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# THE Rag

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ISSUE 2



## Welcome to the RAG Issue 2, Autumn 2007.

The RAG is a magazine produced by a diverse group of anarcha-feminist women in Dublin. We are all feminists, united in our recognition that women's subordination exists. Our struggle needs to be fought alongside the struggle against other forms of oppression, not treated as an afterthought or as a distraction. We are all anarchists, united in our belief for the need to create alternatives to this capitalistic, patriarchal society wherein most are dominated and exploited.

The last 12 months have been very busy for us as individuals and as a collective. RAG meets weekly on Monday night at 7.30pm in Seomra Spraoi (Dublin's social centre). Frequently, the first meeting of the month is an open meeting - among other topics discussed were abortion, mental health, ageism and gender/socialisation. We also organised a day-long workshop and discussion about sexual violence in August 2006 and held a discussion on "Class, Revolution and Feminism" at this year's anarchist bookfair in Dublin. We held workshops, met inspirational women and had a great time at the radical women's gathering in Escanda in Spain in October 2006. In the last year, we also started a distro to sell feminist and anarchist zines, magazines, books and more! We have rolled it out at gigs, brought it to aLAF, the Lesbian Lives conference, and the Dublin, Belfast and London anarchist bookfairs. During the year some of the brilliant RAG women left us - to go back to their homelands, off to the countryside, or overseas. Happily, we've also got some great new members bringing fresh ideas and energy.

We learned a great deal and got loads of interesting feedback from our first issue which came out in October 2006 (some of which is featured inside the back cover). It was amazing to get e-mails and letters from all around the world - thanks everyone. We've talked about some of the criticisms and hopefully taken them on board. Again for this issue, we held discussions based on most of the topics we planned to write about, to help us to explore our ideas fully. However, each article is written by an individual and is not necessarily the opinion of the collective.

Abortion is illegal in Ireland and an average of 17 women each day travel abroad, often alone, to have abortions in unfamiliar cities. We join with Choice Ireland in demanding free, legal abortion in Ireland and in this issue, a number of articles and personal accounts dealing with abortion have been included.

Women are unfortunately still underrepresented and are desperately needed in political collectives, organisations and campaigning groups. We have found that becoming politically active is an empowering step in itself. We hope this magazine inspires you take up your pen, your camera, your paints or your whole body and to get active.

If you want to order copies of RAG contact us at the address below. Also please get in touch with us if you have any comments, suggestions or feedback - we look forward to hearing from you. If you live in or around Dublin and would like to know more or get involved in RAG, send us an email or come to one of our open meetings - we'd love to meet you.

Yours in support and solidarity,

RAG

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The RAG cover: Fernanda

## Table of Contents

Introduction.....	2
Contents .....	3
<b>The Well Fed Café by Marianne</b> .....	4
a lookback at a cooperative café in Dublin	
<b>Magical Girl by Siobhán</b> .....	7
feminist DIY gig organising	
<b>We the Living by Ciara</b> .....	12
abortion in Ireland	
<b>Pro-Choice Campaigning by Shonagh</b> .....	13
<b>Irish Women in London</b> .....	14
personal abortion stories	
<b>Women on Web by Shonagh</b> .....	17
medical abortions online	
<b>Hairy Holidays in Brazil by Fernanda</b> .....	18
photo story	
<b>Are you Fucking Mental? by Sinéad</b> .....	20
an alternative view of mental health	
<b>Seomra Spraoi by Clare</b> .....	22
dublin social centre	
<b>Feminism, Class and Anarchism by Deirdre</b> .....	23
<b>Writing Inspires Change by Dee</b> .....	28
inspiring feminists from the past	
<b>A "Really Useful" Education by Aoife</b> .....	32
community education	
<b>Gendered Revolutions by Marianne</b> .....	37
feminism in times of revolution	
<b>Women and Cycling by Sinéad</b> .....	41
<b>Book Reviews by Tamarack</b> .....	42
<b>RAG Recommends</b> .....	44
<b>Feedback on RAG Issue 1</b> .....	47

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# The Well Fed Café

Based on an interview with Freda Keeshan  
words by Marianne  
Images by Sarah

In 1980 a group of young people began to rent a building in an area of Dublin known as Temple Bar. The original idea was to create a resource centre for unemployed people, but there was no Government funding available. Soon they saw they could create jobs and help themselves during this period when Ireland was in severe depression. They formed collectives and set about turning the building into a usable space. Many of them had previously been on the dole and the collectives created employment, but also a community grew around it. From this one building, known as the Dublin Resource Centre, many projects grew. One collective set up a café called the Well Fed Café which became a well known part of lefty life in Dublin through the years. On the same floor was the Well Read book shop, upstairs was a printing press, and at the back of the building, the only remaining part, Square Wheel bike shop.

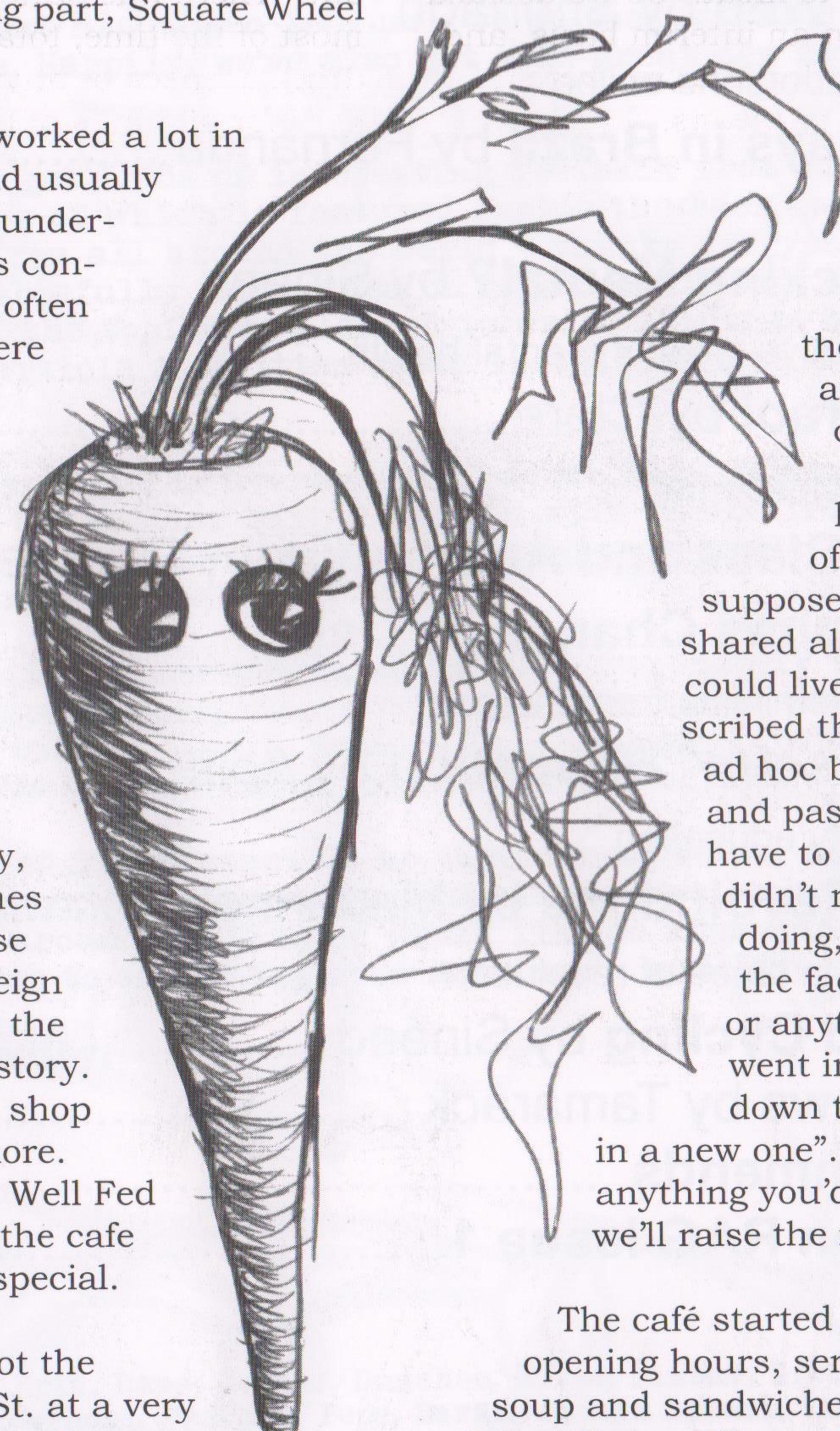
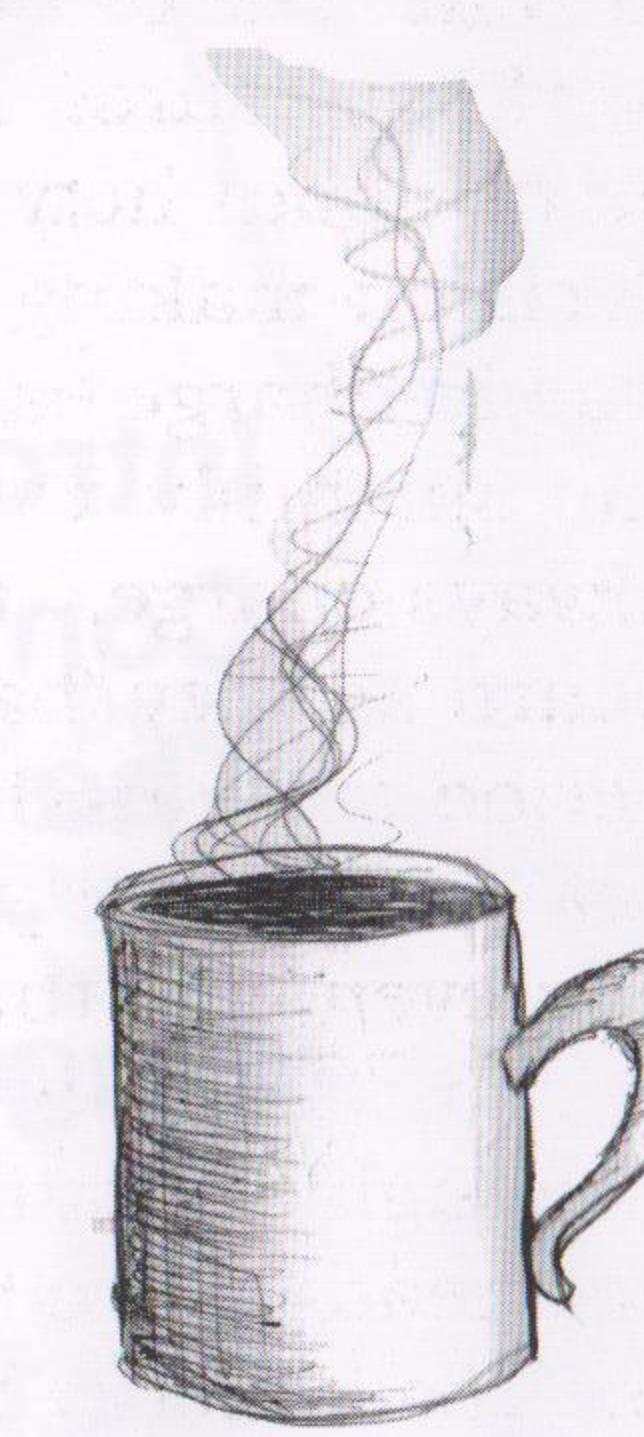
The story intrigued me as I've worked a lot in various cafes over the years and usually found it stressful, exhausting, underpaid work. The idea of workers controlling their own workplace is often shot down by people saying there would be no motivation but I have always imagined there would be more if anything. You would have put in so much more effort and would care so much more about the place. I've heard many stories about workers in factories in South America and in different periods of history taking over their workplaces and splitting the profits equally, but those places and those times or the industrial nature of these workplaces always seemed foreign to me, no matter how amazing the idea was or how inspiring the story. But a café, a bookshop, a bike shop in Dublin, I wanted to know more. I interviewed Freda, one of the Well Fed Café founders to find out how the cafe was run and what made it so special.

The loosely connected group got the building, which was on Crow St. at a very cheap rent as Temple Bar was in line to be knocked down to make way for a bus station. Freda described how the area of Temple Bar was known as the 'left side' of Dublin at the

time, 'full of arty and alternative types' and there was a women's centre nearby. The space was run down when they got it and it took hard work getting it to the point where it could be used. The group had no concrete plans for what they wanted to do with the space when they began renting, but the projects developed with the renovations. As I listened I could feel the energy and enthusiasm that surrounded the building, the café and the collectives it housed.

There were about 25 to 30 people involved in the café alone, ranging from 'earthy co-op whole food types to hardcore political types, so there were many wars between those two' Freda laughed. There was a mix of classes too and the only real common thread seemed to be that they were in their twenties and thirties and believed in collective organisation. 'So I suppose one thing we had in common was a lot of people were on the dole... I suppose there would have been a shared alternative view of how you could live in the world.' She described their planning as naïve and ad hoc but nonetheless the energy and passion kept them going. 'I'd have to say, a lot of the time we didn't really know what we were doing, but that didn't stop us, or the fact that we had no money, or anything. You know, you just went in and said, "We'll knock down that ceiling today and put in a new one". Or if you needed to buy anything you'd say, "lets have a party and we'll raise the money."

The café started unofficially with just a few opening hours, serving lunchtime salads, soup and sandwiches. Each person took turns doing all the different jobs, so someone could be cooking one day, and cleaning the toilets the next. Freda described laughingly how some people were better cooks than others and customers got to know



which day would be the best to visit. She described the good relationships between people and the fun they had working there. Childcare costs were paid for all employees, something almost unheard of at that time or now, and people decided their own working hours. Everyone was involved in decisions about how the place was run, and weekly decision-making meetings were held. One person was in charge each day of 'making sure the day ran smoothly' which meant no one person was in charge. The business gradually came above board as they 'backtracked to legitimise it', over a period of years, learning as they went along. The café became very successful. It got good reviews and even won the vegetarian restaurant of the year award. The food was good and reasonably priced, although the building and atmosphere were 'rough and ready'. Freda claims the success was down to the good energy between the people in the building and that good energy just attracts people.

I asked why the café was vegetarian: 'Actually it was quite an accident that it was vegetarian, when we registered the business and got health board approval it was easier and cheaper for us to get the place to a state where we could serve vegetarian food as opposed to meat. So we decided we would stay vegetarian on an interim basis, and there was the market for it. Not that we were all vegetarians by any manner or means. I remember one time we were cleaning the place on a Sunday and we all went off to McDonald's for our lunch.'

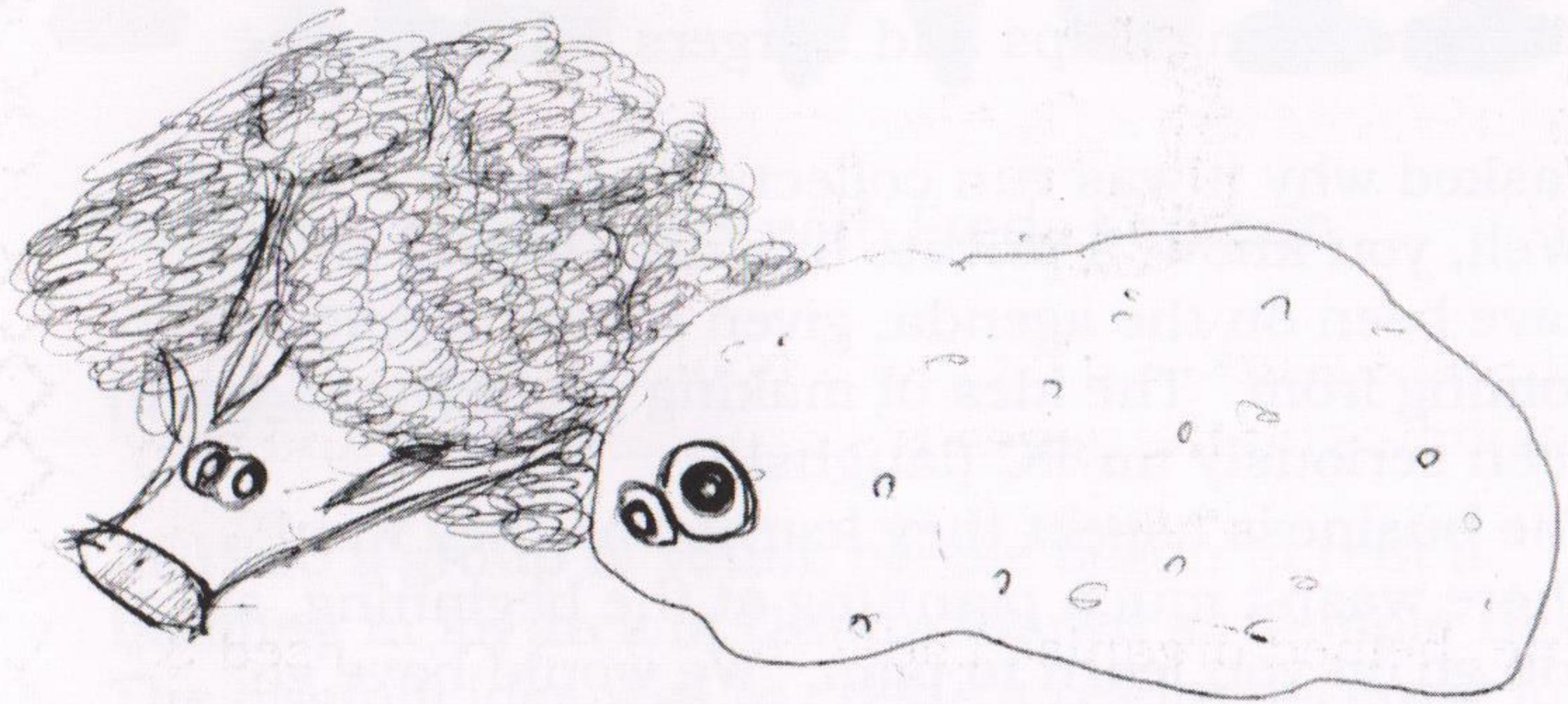
These German people came in, thinking the place was open and they were disgusted to see the staff all there eating chips and burgers (laughs).'

I asked why it was run collectively and as a co-op: 'Well, you know, a private business would never have been on the agenda, given where people were coming from. The idea of making profit would have been seriously un-PC (laughs).'

The business aspect they learned as they went; 'there wasn't much planning at the beginning, as you go on you learn to plan. We would have got pretty good at financial management, budgeting, cash flow, portion control, well, we attempted portion control...'

The ground floor was not only used as a café, various political groups used the space over the years for meetings and for organising campaigns. Often the special branch would be parked outside. But they managed to use the building for plenty of musical sessions and parties through the years as well. Eilish Moore, Christy Moore's sister, worked with us and we'd regularly have music sessions. Friday nights there'd be kind of discos there and benefit nights and other nights. Other people might rent it out. There was quite a hectic social space in there most of the time, totally illegally I have to say, no drink licenses or anything. We had a healthy disregard for all kinds of laws and regulations (laughs). Our policy was just to ignore them until they came knocking on your door.'





The Well Read was a radical book shop 'selling political books, feminist books, gay books, when no one else had them.' There was a printing press upstairs. At the time RTE only produced a guide for what was on RTE 1 and 2 even though everyone had the UK channels too, and it was actually illegal to produce a full TV guide. The printing press did exactly that and sold the guides door to door, and did well out of it. Ciaran in the square wheel bike shop was at the back and is still in the same building today. The different co-ops 'looked after their own business' but met once a month to make decisions affecting the whole building and 'elected a management committee from all the co-ops to negotiate with Temple Bar [Properties Ltd.] or to renew the lease, collect the rent, negotiate with the landlord...and to sort out putting in central heating, and general maintenance of the building.' There were always problems with how short the lease was and this prevented long term development of the building. Members of the Dublin Resource Centre were active in the (ultimately successful) venture of trying to convince the government to develop Temple Bar instead of knocking it down.

Dynamics changed in the café as problematic issues arose. Freda described how she came across the article 'The Tyranny of Structurelessness'\* at that time. She saw a connection. 'So it's like, you either have legitimate structures in terms of who has power and how decisions are made or you have a very ad hoc structure like we had. You know, there's always power. People have it for many reasons other than the position they're in. So it could be knowledge that gives them power or it could be how long they were there, could be personality reasons, these hierarchies built up'.

Those of us that were there the longest were very naïve about new people coming, because people who had been there from the beginning had developed it, had other reasons for being there rather than making money. But as it got bigger people came because of the money, it was a great job, you get to do everything and they pay for your childcare. They really didn't have much interest in running the place. And it was quite naïve really to expect them to have an interest. So we kind of went on to have two groups; the older people and the newer people. So that would have been a big division.'

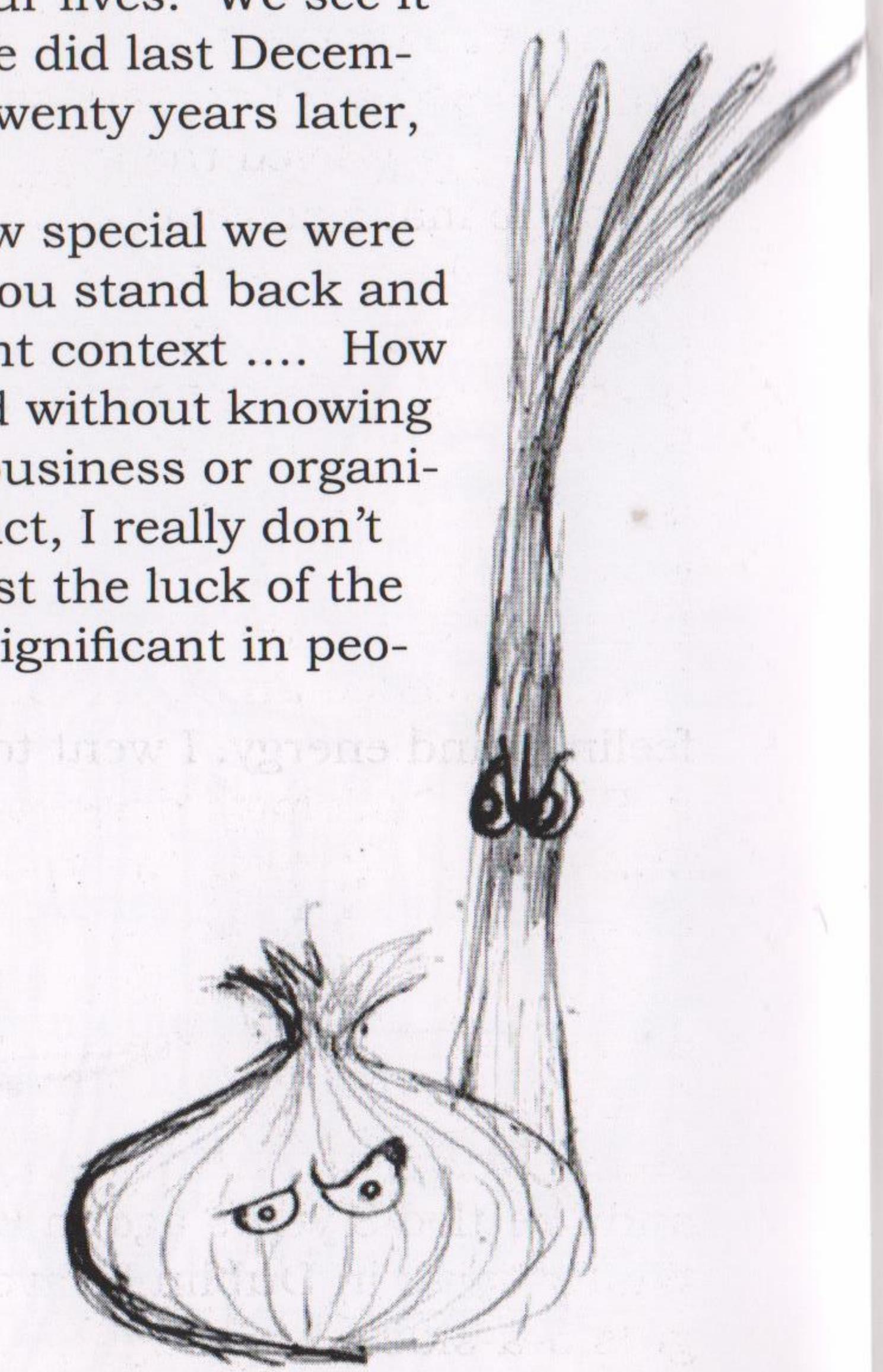
Everyone who worked there was automatically a member of the co-op and many of the values which the original members had, such as collective organisation were not shared by the newer members. Freda suggested it would have been better to have a period of time when someone just worked there and then applied to become part of the co-op. Also she saw problems with the focus on short term decisions. 'Well, when it's going well it really works, you know. For years the two weekly meetings worked. I suppose I'd have to say, in terms of long term development... I think everyone sitting around a table works well in the short term. But there was no one whose responsibility it was to develop that in the long term or to make hard decisions. And to take the flak, which is what a manager or CEO does. So, in retrospect, and I'm only talking about this in hindsight, I'm not saying we would have done it otherwise, but nobody did those things, and that was partly what led to us closing'.

'So in the end, the way it folded, it was really because the energy and passion, the closeness and warmth and good craic, just kind of left. A lot of good people had left, for other people, the place was just a job...breaking the budget was always a strain. There were many times when we thought, 'oh we'll have to close down soon, we owe too much money'. There was the VAT man you know, and the tax man, financial strain. But basically we just carried on.'

The café remained as a co-op until 1994, (10 years!) and then was taken over as a private business, by some of its members, closing for good in 1996. Freda described how important the café had been to those involved.

I would have to say, there were many wars in those times but it was a significant experience in all our lives. We see it when we meet up, as we did last December [2004], you know, twenty years later, definitely. 'But we had no idea how special we were either. It's only when you stand back and look at it from a different context .... How we did as well as we did without knowing anything about either business or organisational issues or conflict, I really don't know. I suppose it's just the luck of the draw...but it was very significant in people's lives.'

\*The Tyranny Of Structurelessness was written by Jo Freeman in 1970 available at [http://flag.blackened.net/revolt/hist\\_texts/structurelessness.html](http://flag.blackened.net/revolt/hist_texts/structurelessness.html)



# Magical

Words by Siobhán  
Photos by Ben Murphy and Siobhán

I decided to write this article to show how easily people can do something to change the world around them if they have the real desire to see change. Even on a small scale, individual action can take on quite a momentum. One idea carried out by one person can inspire others to do the same elsewhere so networks are built up and strength is gathered in numbers. Individual action is within everyone's grasp. Butterfly effect, ripple effect whatever you want to call it. It works but it has to start with you doing something. If no-one else is doing something you believe in – diy. Do It Yourself. There's no-one stopping you.

I love and respect most things about life. I have a huge love for women, music, alternative thinking, kindness, love, children, the elderly, feelings, nature, diy culture and creativity. The idea of abuse against any of these things makes me sick to the stomach.

I was brought up in a white, upper class town called Harrogate in North Yorkshire, England by two hard working, Irish Catholic parents. I have 1 brother and 2 sisters. I'm the eldest. When I was 7 years old I got a certificate for always being happy. I was the first girl at my primary school to ever play on the football team. I didn't really fit in with the other girls at school. I had more in common with the boys but didn't hang out with them too much because I was a girl. I got a school report at 11 saying I seemed a bit solitary sometimes. I came out as gay at 17 and lived the usual teenage angst whilst trying to make sense of being a gay female living in a world which wasn't supportive of anything which I felt was real. We lived on a farm with no decent transport anywhere so I spent a lot of time in my bedroom frustrated with what I considered a sexist, homophobic, racist, unjust world. From the windows I'd look at the hills in the distance where Leeds lay out of reach. I wanted my world to be different. I needed an outlet for all my thoughts and feelings and energy. I went to Liverpool, got a degree in PE and Sociology, discovered Feminist Theory and the gay scene in Liverpool. I wrote essays on Cagney and Lacey and a thesis on being brought up Catholic and a lesbian. After 3 years studying I decided being a gay PE teacher wasn't for me and I went travelling. I have lived and worked in Yorkshire, Liverpool, Washington DC, a Kibbutz in Israel and I settled 8 years ago in Dublin, Ireland. Whilst living in Dublin I have organised a queer girls 5-a-side soccer night, run Dublin Lesbian

Line, helped organise Ladyfest Dublin, organised 3 Grrrl Rock nights for the yearly Lesbian Arts Festival (aLAF) and helped run a feminist gig promotions project called 'Hivemind'. Last year I started a feminist, queer, diy project called Magical Girl. That's the nosey bit about me over with. I just wrote that to give a bit of my background as an individual who's been born into a certain time and place in this world. I realise that I'm really lucky to be born into a wealthy, healthy part of the world. However there are still injustices and inequalities happening in my immediate world which I would like to change. This is why I started Magical Girl.

In October 2006, I was going to see an Erase Errata gig in Dublin. Erase Errata are from San Francisco and are one of the most talented line-up of musicians you can get. Jenny Hoyston, Ellie Erickson and Bianca Spartan create one of the tightest post-punk sounds around. To see them play live is to experience something you will never forget. Their politics are feminist, diy, queer, punk, riot grrrl so I imagined I was going to see lots riot grrrl loving women, female punks and females in general at a full-to-capacity gig.

But about 70 people turned up in a venue which can hold 300. There were about 10 women at the gig and I reckon I was one of 3 queers. The support bands, although good Dublin bands, were, as usual, all male and the whole excitement I'd had earlier at the possibility of enjoying an alternative female, queer space disappeared. I looked around the venue, looked at Erase Errata playing a blinding gig and imagined all the other crowds Erase Errata had seen during their European/US tour. I was embarrassed, then I was really, really pissed off. What had I expected though? I had experienced this before at gigs in Dublin.

The same had happened with a Hivemind gig in 2005. We had put on Tobi Vail's band Spider and the Webs and Alison Wolfe's band Partyline. Both these women were key in starting the Riot Grrrl/Ladyfest Movement in America in the 90's with their bands Bikini Kill and Bratmobile. I had read so much about them in the past and listened to Bikini Kill's lyrics with feminist pleasure. I was really excited to be meeting them and I had assumed that these two women playing on a stage in Dublin would result in droves of people coming along just to see them. The turnout again for this gig was about 100 people with maybe about 20 women and

I've been thinking about why. There are loads of social, cultural and economic reasons I can guess at.

Since the 1990's, Dublin has gone through an intense period of economic growth and social change (generally referred to as the Celtic Tiger). In 2007, Dublin has become the 4th richest city in the world, richer than New York and London and is the 16th most expensive city on the planet. Dubliners have more money than ever before and a consumerist, capitalist approach has become a disappointing norm. Dubliners and their new surplus of money have caught the eye of UK/American companies who have come into Dublin and bought up nearly every bit of space and turned the city into a bland, corporate-invested, plastic shopping mall of non-Irish owned chain stores. Small businesses now don't stand a chance of survival in their city centre as rents soar and one by one independent spaces close down. No matter how much myself and others might resent all this, it does seem that the majority of Dublin's small population (1.1 million) is generally happy enough (this includes the gay community) to exist in this consumer-focussed capitalist society. Alternative lifestyle to what I've got? No thanks. Erase Errata? Never heard of them. Feminism what? What you going on about? We're fine, there's no need to look for an alternative.

Obviously there are loads of other factors as to why the gig was so poorly attended. I didn't think the (male) promoter had promoted it with a passion, another punk gig (Porco Dio) was on and a lot of the punk girls were there. There's always going to be reasons why gigs aren't attended but there was something upsetting me about the pattern these gigs were taking.

After the gig we went drinking. I walked into the pub and some drunken slob decided he had a god given right



to grope my bum as I walked past him. He was gross and it upset me and made me angry at how women can still be totally disrespected. I listened to Jenny's (Erase Errata) bewilderment at the lack of the queer/female scene in Dublin and to finish the night perfectly I ended up dragging another drunken guy away from our group of women whilst the two burly bouncers looked on bored. The next day, I freaked. I freaked big time. Part hangover and part immense anger. Anger at the seeming lack of appreciation for women in bands, for women in general, for the lack of encouragement given to girls to start bands, to be alternative, to be creatively confident, to believe in themselves as human beings who should be respected for their infinite potential. I started to write page after page of anger, swearing and disbelief that this was the state of things the world over and how sexism is still rampant in so many different areas of life no matter what culture or country we're born into.

Women are still not given the same chances as men today no matter what we may be led to believe. There have been gestures towards equality for definite and women are certainly better off in a lot of areas than they were but realistically women are not equally encouraged or supported to have the same financial, economic, social and creative freedom as men.

I do realise that there is a sexism directed towards men also, but I see women facing a much more aggressive, abusive and frightening level of sexism which ultimately tries to control how women and girls live their lives. What could be done to change this even on a small scale? I wanted to see something happening in Dublin which would spark up a lot more cop on and appreciation of women and the female world. There needed to be a space created to celebrate and encourage female talent and encourage more women to be present in the crowd. Not

Magical Girl Compilation #1 (Excerpts from the leaflet given out with the cd)

All the songs on this cd are by women in bands with other women, or with men, or just women on their own. The idea in giving you this cd is that you, as one of the many teenage girls kicking around the town of a Saturday will be so amazingly inspired by this cd that you'll stop kicking around the town watching the boys go off starting their bands and you'll either go and join them, or better still go and like all the girls on this cd did, start something of your own.

If you don't start a band after listening to this cd, which in fairness isn't likely, then maybe there's something else you could start doing? Just get involved in something other than watching TV, start something with your friends, or on your own, or people you don't know, write some articles, draw some pictures, put them together and what have you got? Your first zine! There's so much creative stuff you could do, the thing is to find something you like, it doesn't matter what, but start doing something and see where it goes from there. Being a girl is really cool and sometimes we're not encouraged or given the confidence to do something we'd like to – the trick is to just believe yourself that what's inside of you is pretty cool and it's worth sharing what you've got with others. The world is full of male stuff already – we need to get active in making the world more female- in whatever shape that takes.

The tiny coverage given to women in music on all radio stations, television and music magazines would have us believe that women are only able to make commercial, mainstream, men-please-look-at-me-as-a-sex-object, basically crap, bland, pop music. I'd say about 5% of media coverage is given to alternative women's music- it's such a rare occurrence it's sickening. This cd compilation is to make you aware of some of the women who are already out there involved in the alternative, independent music scene in Ireland. They are alive and kicking and we should support them when we can.

None of the women on this cd have a management company looming over them, controlling their image or the music they make. This means all the women on this cd took it upon themselves one day to make their own noise. They look and sound exactly how they please; they do not follow any trends, they believe in their own female creativity and they believe in their right to explore it in whatever way feels good for them. It'd be great if more and more girls started to do this in music and in everything and anything they felt the urge to do. Just to have that belief and a confidence that whatever you wanted to do- you can. Even if you think it's something crap – it might be amazingly interesting, so just do it rather than doing nothing and put it out there rather than not. Femaleness is such a strong thing and our world needs to see way more of it.

This I guess doesn't read too well and hardly says anything of what I want to say- but I've written something rather than writing nothing - and I'm doing something about what I feel is important rather than doing nothing at all and this is what I want all girls to do so that there's more colour in our existence and more variety out there for everyone to enjoy. We all bring something different into our world and that difference is interesting and should be out there rather than not.

The idea behind this cd has the support of loads of people through the ages. If you look up the thinking behind Feminism, Ladyfest, Riot Grrl, they all hold the belief that being female is extra special and fun and deserves equal, if not greater respect in our world. All the bands who agreed to be on this cd and all the people who helped in the making of this cd and the cd covers all believe there needs to be more femaleness in the world too.

So, hope you enjoy this cd- please copy it and give it to your friends. One last message - girls, be kind to each other and support each other in your differences.

Love from all who have helped with Magical Girl xxx (Aiva, Karla Celine, Ruth, Eileen, Edel, Sinéad, Helen, Mary, Marianne, Shonagh, Dee, Deirdre, Cathy, Ffuts, Joan, Cheryl, Dave, Kirstie, Barry, Paul, Clodagh, Debbie, Ciara, Abigail, Lisa, Sue, Therese, Emily, Cara, Mairéad, Kate, Sheila and Siobhan xx)

just as a one off event but a regular, continuous female space and stage.

There needed to be some projects set up to try and drag more young female minds away from shopping, make-up and consumerism and inspire them towards a realisation of their real talents and alternative ways of being. I started to write down some ideas for projects/workshops for young girls, women and felt it was time something new started.

This new 'project' was called Magical Girl, partly out of respect to the Erase Errata gig which fired up all this energy (Erase Errata have a song called 'He Wants What's Mine' which have the lyrics, 'she was a beautiful, magical girl') and partly to keep visible the fact that every time the words



Magical Girl are seen/heard there's a little reminder that women/girls really are something extra special.

It's a little reminder people working in both the mainstream and 'alternative' media could do with. The coverage given to female music nearly makes invisible the fact that there are women out there creating amazing alternative music. The radio stations/TV/magazines don't seem to want anyone to know that there are other alternative women out there apart from Beth Ditto and Karin O. I still drive to work listening to Dublin's 'alternative' radio station and during the hour it takes me to get to work I'd be lucky to hear 10% of airplay given to female bands. The constancy of this gets really, really annoying. This lack of exposure given to female bands hardly encourages younger girls to start bands, it's not really

considered as an option because it's not visible. As a result there is a huge imbalance in the number of girls and boys starting bands so we're left with fewer female bands and the media largely ignoring the ones who do exist.

To change this I reckoned if I made a whole load of cds with alternative, female, diy bands, I could give them out to teenage girls around Dublin to try and make them aware of what was really going on, to try to change the way they thought about women and music. I realised it was only a small thing but anything at this stage I felt might make a small difference to someone, somewhere. So I compiled a playlist of songs by female, diy bands in Ireland, UK and USA, sent off messages to all the bands explaining the project, asking if they'd agree to be on the compilation. All bands messaged back loving the idea and saying they were very happy to be included on the cd. That was the cd content sorted.

I bought 100 recycled cardboard cd covers and came up with the idea that instead of making one design for the cd cover and photocopying it 100 times, each cd cover could be an individual work of female art. It was just a simple idea, but it was a way of getting a group of women together to be creative and it was a way to get another bit of feminist activity going on in Dublin. I sent out an email to friends, a bulletin over myspace and posted posters up inviting women to an afternoon of diy cd cover making in Seomra Spraoi.

On February 24th 2007, 21 women turned up. Some friends and some I had never met before. It was amazing. It was lovely. It was quietly powerful. It was female. At 9pm there were 100 individually made Magical Girl cd covers for the cds. I then felt something needed to be written to go in with the cd which would explain to the girls why they were being given the cd.

On Saturday 24th March 2007, 8 of us met up, Sinead, Aiva, Karla, Joan, Cathy, Ffuts, Sherry and me and we gave out the Magical Girl Compilation cds to the girls in Temple Bar. The gangs of girls were so smiley and enthusiastic that I ended up just watching the others giving out the cd for the most part, just I guess to witness in my own head what was happening. I admit I got a bit teary thinking back to the anger I felt, the ideas I had written and the longing I had for something to happen to change things a little bit. To watch these women who had such belief in the project to give up their Saturday afternoon giving out the cd's and talking to the smiling, interested, listening teenage girls. My happiness was immense. I did manage to give out about 10 cds - and if I felt that if there was a lot of chat going on I threw out the question 'so if I said the word Feminism to you, what do you think?' and I'm smiling even typing this because their reactions were so positive.

It was something I didn't expect in 2007 but a lot of the girl's immediate response was to put their fists in the air and say 'Girl Power'. Now I know the Spice Girls get a lot of stick for promoting Girl Power as a commercial slogan, but I saw a lot of strength from the girls standing in front

of me with their 'Girl Power' and fists in air. They meant it in a strong individual here and now way - it wasn't just a catchphrase - you could see it in their eyes and the way they were. They had enthusiasm for being a girl, I'm telling you, it was real and it was strong and it was said with a belief. It was one of the best things I'd seen in a long time. When we explained a little about what Magical Girl was about and what it was going to try to do there was so much positivity and enthusiasm from the teenagers. There was definite feedback from them that they did go to all ages gigs and thinking about it they said all the bands were boys and this wasn't a good thing. When asked about trying to get an all ages Magical Girl gig sorted and having them involved in performing and organising the gigs themselves they were very excited.

On the Monday after giving out the cd's I got some very enthusiastic emails from some of the girls who had been given the cd's but since then there's not been so much feedback. I suppose that's the nature of being a young teenager - loads of enthusiasm until the next best thing comes along (usually within the hour).

Problems for an all ages gig arose then when I rang the only two venues which allow all ages gigs in Dublin (Voodoo Lounge and Radio City) I was told they charged €1000-€1250 for the venue from 11am-5pm. This has halted the idea of the all ages gig. Temporarily. Magical Girl has organised some over 18's gigs,

which have been a great success. The first was on Friday 8th December 2006. The Boom Boom Room was hired for €175 and I asked Party Weirdo, Stagger Lee, The Skuts and Zing to play. I sent

emails, texts, and messages from my myspace page. My friend Celine, a graphic designer did up some posters and fliers, which we put around town. Cheryl, Dave, Eileen and Sinéad did the door and bands all brought their own back line. The venue was full to capacity and the venue was about 75% female both on stage and in the crowd.

Since then Magical Girl has helped organise and provide a stage for queer, non-queer, female, transgender, alternative, diy bands such as Vile Vile Creatures, Rae Spoon, Lianne Hall, Renminbi, Scream Club, Janey Mac, Das Wanderlust, Ebony Bones, Estel, Jenny & the Deadites, Ophelia, Ewa Gigon, Queen Kong and White Noise. It's a good feeling knowing that Magical Girl has now created a regular space in Dublin where these bands find honest support, tireless promotion and a passion for what they're doing. I started something that has hopefully made a little difference in Dublin. I feel it has. It has also made a difference outside of Dublin. A girl called Anna from Female Trouble a feminist group in Manchester emailed me saying that she was going to do the Magical Girl cd project in Manchester. She'd heard about it from an email that was sent to a feminist forum in the UK.

The email had apparently been sent by Catherine Redfern, editor and founder of the UK based contemporary Feminist website the F-word, praising the work of Magical Girl in Dublin:

*'I came across this amazing, brilliant example of activism from 'Magical Girl' a diy, feminist group in Dublin. What a really simple idea! I thought I would post it in case it inspires others. The links have pictures which are worth seeing. I have copied the text from the site which is below'*

She then posted all the

stuff I have on my blog about the Magical Girl cd project and that's how Anna heard about the cd project.

As well as being done in Manchester, a girl called Shelly was reading the Magical Girl myspace page and emailed me to see if she and her friends Maria, Briona and Lisa down in Cork could do the cd project there. They did exactly the same and it was brilliant. They are all now working towards Ladyfest Cork 2008.

A girl called Ruth who came down from Belfast to the Dublin cd making session also wants to organise for the project in Belfast. Last week Ruth organised her first gig in ages and called the night Magical Girl Belfast. Cindy and Sarah from Scream Club also asked me if I'd mind if they did the Magical Girl cd project in their hometown Olympia, Washington. I was kind of stunned that these two wanted to take the project to Olympia, the home of the first ever Ladyfest.

I have no idea what the future of Magical Girl is. Magical Girl has certainly taken off in a way I didn't expect. I think that implies that there was a need for this kind of project in Dublin. Happily at the time of writing this, Seomra Spraoi has moved into a bigger and better building in Dublin and Sinéad is going to start running all ages gigs there which is the best news in a long time. I personally am finding that Magical Girl takes up a lot of time and I'm exhausted so I want to hand it over to other women who I know will run Magical Girl with a similar passion and vision.

That vision is simply to have a space in Dublin, which is respectful to women, men and transgender people, queer and non queer people and people who just want to have fun. The crowds at Magical Girl gigs have always been a healthy mix of all sorts and there's been some vibe at each of the Magical Girl gigs. People seem to leave completely hyped or moved or wowed. I think it's because they've just experienced a gig that was more than just about the music. It was a gig, for anyone who was interested, with a vision of equality and fun.

Links:

Magical Girl Dublin- [www.myspace.com/ladylucan](http://www.myspace.com/ladylucan)  
Seomra Spraoi - [www.seomraspraoi.org](http://www.seomraspraoi.org)  
Revolt Video - [www.revoltvideo.blogspot.com](http://www.revoltvideo.blogspot.com)  
Indymedia - [www.indymedia.ie](http://www.indymedia.ie)  
The F-word - [www.thefword.org.uk](http://www.thefword.org.uk)  
aLAf - [www.myspace.com/alafireland](http://www.myspace.com/alafireland)  
Ladyfest Cork - [www.myspace.com/ladyfestcork](http://www.myspace.com/ladyfestcork)  
Ladyfest Europe - [www.myspace.com/ladyfesteurope](http://www.myspace.com/ladyfesteurope)  
Get In The Ring (Cork) [www.myspace.com/getintheringcork](http://www.myspace.com/getintheringcork)  
Rock n Roll Camp (UK) [www.myspace.com/rocknrollcampforgirlsuk](http://www.myspace.com/rocknrollcampforgirlsuk)

Also - go onto [www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org) and do a search on Riot Grrrl, Ladyfest, Feminism, Diy

# We the living...

## Abortion in Ireland

words by ciara

photos by brid ni luasaigh

**"One method of destroying a concept is by diluting its meaning. Observe that by ascribing rights to the unborn, i.e., the non-living, the anti-abortionists obliterate the rights of the living: the right of young people to set the course of their own lives." - Ayn Rand\***

Abortion is illegal in Ireland. At least 17 women travel from Ireland every day to access legal abortion services overseas. The situation here is worsening as the state fails to legislate following High Court rulings which mean that it should be available where a woman's life is at risk, and politicians refuse to put their heads above the parapet and speak out on the issue. The maddening part is that the majority of the country supports legislation and supports abortion in certain cases. The problem is, the so-called pro-life lobbyists are far better funded, more vocal and seemingly more powerful than the pro-choice groups.

The term "pro-life" is inherently misleading, and a beloved euphemism of the anti-choice brigade. We can't (as anti-abortion lobbyists would wish us to) answer questions such as, 'When does life begin?' It is simply something that is not knowable. Basing an entire argument on something profoundly unknowable is ridiculous. Each woman has her own personal philosophy, spiritual or religious beliefs, or ethical compass. Surely it is an individual decision when it cannot be proven exactly when life begins. How can we continue to legislate against this? The sentiment of LIFE is only the tip of the iceberg in the never-ending list of hypocrisies the anti-choice movement is riddled with.

Another one of the anti-choice slogans is: Abortion – Know the Facts. It seems that there is a perception in the anti-choice movement that there are women everywhere who simply if they know 'what they were doing' by having an abortion, if they understood what the foetus looked like, and how developed it is, that it would somehow change their decision, turn them 180°, and make them feel differently about their crisis pregnancy. As if there are women out there who would blindly have an abortion with no idea of what the procedure means. As though women have no sense of

right and wrong – in this we are overtly reminded of the draconian notion of women as sensual creatures, incapable of rational thought, unable to control our desires. These views are predicated on the prevailing nineteenth-century prejudice that women are inferior beings on account of their essentially bestial character. For the Greeks, women were intrinsically irrational and animalistic - a view both carried over to, as well as preconditioned by, the nature of their own mythological characters. This has carried forward in one form or another throughout the HIStory of patriarchy. But this engagement with the 'reality' of an abortion is something that women do already, and does not affect in the least women's right to reproductive freedom and autonomy over their bodies outside the control of church and state.

'Pro-life' campaigners often show women who are considering abortion pictures of foetuses and videos of abortion tools. They are only presenting a graphic medical procedure. If you showed someone images of a heart bypass or even close-ups of dentistry it would be deeply unpleasant and traumatic. If they wanted women to know 'all the facts' before making their decision, shouldn't they also be showing videos of women with screaming children demanding energy from her that she doesn't have anymore? Videos of women in poverty. Beaten women. Videos of women who had to give up their work to mind their children because costs of childcare are so prohibitive. Women who suffer from depression. Do they sweep this under the carpet? Does the anti-choice movement protest for better conditions for women who choose parenting? Do their Church and funders provide monetary assistance to single parents in need?

A staff member in the 'Women's Resource Centre', a christian-run rogue pregnancy counselling agency exposed by Choice Ireland, explained about the women they 'save' from choice: When they have their child, they love it, and say that they would give up anything for the child. However, this is not an argument against abortion. It only proves that women adapt and deal with motherhood in even the most difficult circumstances. It does not mean that they should not have the choice to decide if/when they want a child.

Abortion is like a fingerprint, every case is uniquely different. Each woman's life is uniquely complex, with their own personal story, conditions, and finances, emotional and inner world. Can you ever claim to know each individual case? Can any of us truly make decisions for another person which affects their life? Women can end up being unwilling carriers of an unwanted child who could bear the brunt of emotional scarring and resentment as well as financial strain. The anti-choice rhetoric omits much of the reality of

an abortion - they seem to forget that having an abortion is not like having a tooth pulled; it is a life-changing experience which will never be fully understood unless you have the direct experience of yourself or a loved one going through the process.

The idea that abortion is in some way an easy way out for women is ludicrous. The idea that abortion is not a last resort is insane. The idea that women are irresponsible and somehow brought this on themselves is a basic misogynistic statement wracked with misunderstanding and lack of insight and education. The pro-choice movement does not question the reason for the abortion – there are no 'good' and 'bad' abortions – the idea that somehow its ok to abort because of a rape, but not because you don't feel emotionally or financially ready to bring a child into the world. There are no conditions where abortion is or is not ethically acceptable. The pro-choice movement is also vehemently opposed to the system in this country that does not support women who choose to continue with their pregnancies. Being pro-choice is about providing the structures and systems to support women in whatever choice they wish to make.

Abortion is not only a 'women's issue' – it's a class issue. Most of us have not got the approximate 1,200 euro (600 euro for the procedure then flights, accommodation and a partner or friend's travel expenses) for the process. Abortion in private clinics in the UK is a commodity, plain and simple. This situation discriminates against young women, those in care, women in abusive relationships, women with certain disabilities, poor women, those without residential status in the country, and generally any but the freest and best-off, who are able to travel easily. And no matter what your reason for choosing to have an abortion, as a woman in Ireland you must suffer with all the Catholic guilt of your foremothers; sneak away, suffer alone, keep hidden, keep secret.

Where abortion is illegal and unsafe, women are forced to carry unwanted pregnancies to term or suffer serious health consequences and even death from backstreet and illegal abortions. Approximately 13 percent of maternal deaths worldwide are attributable to unsafe abortion—between 68,000 and 78,000

deaths annually.

Individual rights begin at birth, with the creation of a new, separate human being. Rights should essentially only apply to an individual entity or group – not a potential human. Especially considering the rights of the unborn foetus are given preference to the rights of the mother. Rights begin when a human being exists, not when it might. Looking at the abortion debate through the lens of human rights is the crux of the pro-choice movement.

Women's rights groups and feminist as well as anarchist organisations across the world have fought for the right to access safe and legal abortion for decades, and more recently have been seeking out international human rights law which supports their right to access to safe abortion services. In fact, international human rights law requires women to have a right to decide independently in all matters related to reproduction, including the issue of abortion. And yet Ireland remains in the dark and silent on this issue. While continuing to charge hugely prohibitive VAT costs on condoms, the contraceptive pill and other reliable contraceptives, as well as lacking proper sex education legislation to ensure all children are properly educated about sex, pregnancy and contraception.

Abortion is a political and human right, and should be upheld as such. The principle of a woman's duty and selflessness to bear a child against her will is tantamount to slavery. Anarchist and feminist principles are obviously opposed to all forms of enforced action and this is one of the most serious examples of enforced action and slavery possible. Every mother willing, every child wanted.

\* Ayn Rand: "A Last Survey — Part I", The Ayn Rand Letter Vol. IV, No. 2, 1975.

## Pro-Choice Campaigning in Ireland

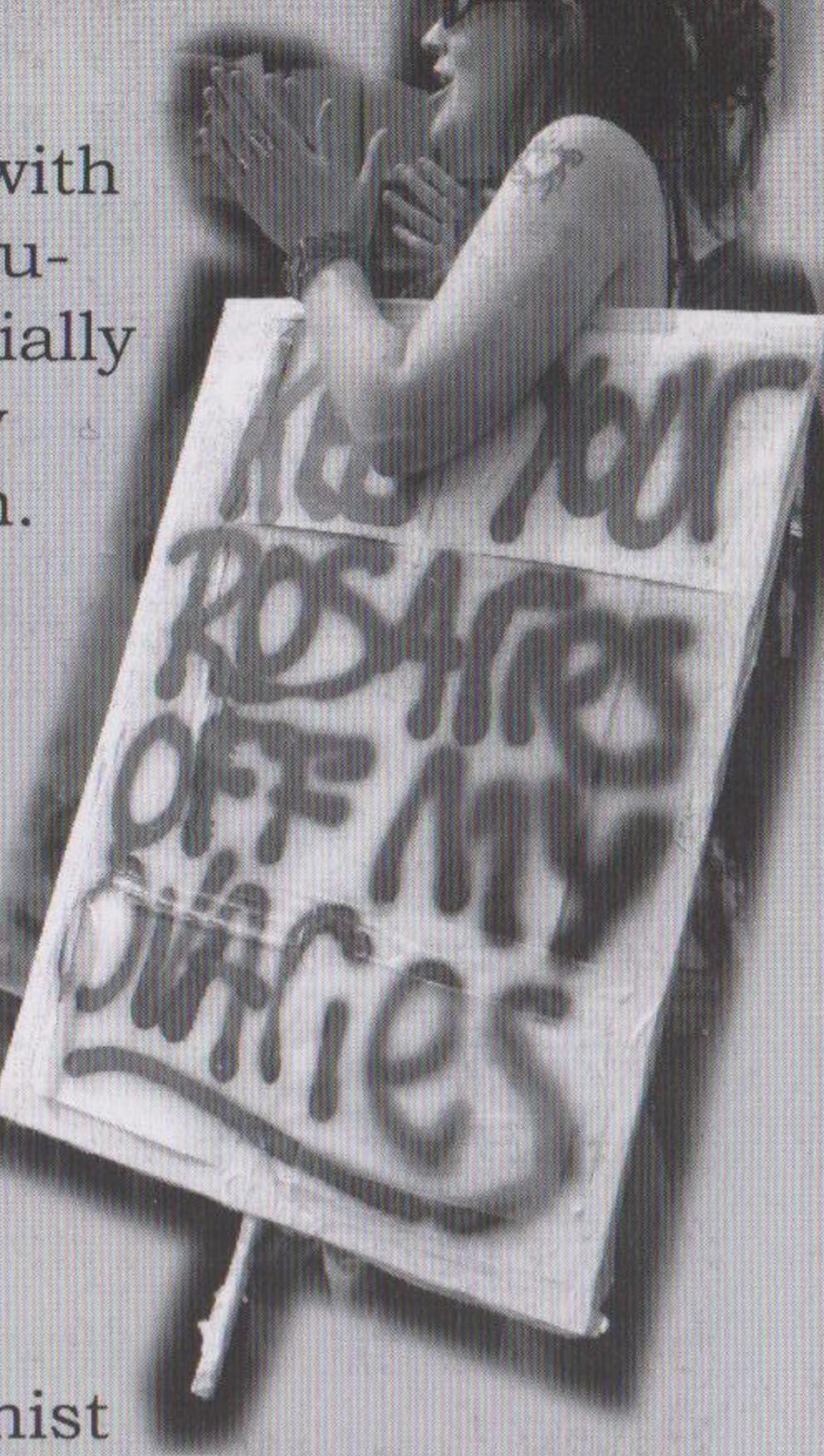
words by shonagh

**"Abortion can be an act of economic desperation under an economic exploitation which ... offers women minimal options both in the workplace and in the home. If the right to abortion is a stepping stone toward freedom, it can be so only along with other kinds of stepping stones, other kinds of actions" Adrienne Rich**

There are many aspects to choice. The lack of free, safe, legal abortion services in this country are symptomatic of a broader problem of lack of respect for women and lack of trust in us to make our own decisions regarding our bodies and our sexuality. Thus, pro-choice campaigning is feminist campaigning. It includes criticisms on the lack of proper sex education, free contraceptives, impartial pregnancy counselling, services for pregnancy and birth and childcare as well as the lack of free, safe and legal abortion services in this country.

The choice to have a child should not be limited by economic factors. Mothers should not be discriminated against for having made the choice to have a child. Women should not be discriminated against for choosing not to bear children. Yet women in Ireland, and worldwide, continue to be defined and controlled by their reproductive capacities; within the home, in the community and in the workplace. The state continues to collude with the religious right in denying women access to their fundamental rights to control their own bodies. This situation must end.

Choice Ireland is a new pro-choice campaigning group set up this year. It unites people from all different political backgrounds (and none) in feminist principles. If you wish to get involved, email them at choiceireland@gmail.com or check them out at [www.choiceireland.blogspot.com](http://www.choiceireland.blogspot.com) (new website under construction).



# Irish Women in England ... Abortion Stories

## NAOMI

*"No woman can call herself free who does not own and control her body. No woman can call herself free until she can choose consciously whether she will or will not be a mother."* - Margaret Sanger

On 18th February 2005, I left Ireland for London. It was a trip shrouded by secrecy and lies. I was terrified that someone would discover the real reasons for my weekend visit to London. I wasn't doing anything wrong. Sixteen other women that very day would board a plane or a ferry for the very same reasons. The next day I had an abortion.

On Christmas Eve morning I had unprotected sex with my boyfriend. I was drunk and got caught up in the heat of the moment. It was a stupid decision to make and I've never repeated it since. I realised that my period was late three weeks after that but I wasn't worried at first. I wasn't the model of healthy living and just thought it was my body's way of telling me to calm down. I mentioned it to my boyfriend but told him not to worry.

However, a few days later I found myself sitting in a cubicle in the toilets of the Stephen's Green Shopping Centre and that little blue cross meant I was pregnant. I didn't cry at first, I was totally numb. That evening I met up with my boyfriend and we discussed what we were going to do. I didn't want to have a baby. I was twenty two years old and I'd been with my boyfriend for six months. I loved him but I wasn't that naïve that I thought we were going to be together forever. He was in college and I wanted to travel around the world. I didn't want to have a baby. Not now.

The next night I went to the Well Woman Clinic

on Liffey Street. I knew I was pregnant but decided to get a second opinion. The middle aged nurse confirmed that I was pregnant. I told her I planned to have a termination and asked about information. She asked me had I spoken to my partner and I told her I had. She then asked me had I told my parents and she told me that I shouldn't rush into anything because I might regret it. At the time I was so angry because I felt that she knew absolutely nothing about me, about my life and about my circumstances, but I know now she was only doing her job. I asked her if I could organise pregnancy counselling in order to get some information about clinics in England. We stood in reception while the receptionist went through the diary. She gave me a knowing look as she told me I'd have to wait three weeks for an appointment. Three Weeks! I didn't want to be still pregnant in 3 weeks time, let alone still waiting for information. I had chosen a bad time to get pregnant. Greatest demand for emergency contraception and pregnancy counselling occurs following major sporting events, bank holidays and Christmas. This would suggest that when people are socialising more and drinking, there is a greater risk of having unprotected sex.

I got the number of the British Providers of Abortion Services (BPAS) off the internet myself and rang their information line and booked an appointment. I booked a hotel and flights to London and started to save as much cash as I could. We told everybody that we were going away for a romantic weekend as it was a few days after Valentine's Day. On the Friday morning we flew to London on the first flight from Dublin airport as it was the least expensive flight. We were scared that people would ask us about what we'd done and seen over the weekend so we spent the Friday afternoon legging it around to as many tourist attractions as we could, Big Ben, Trafalgar Square, Abbey Road and the Millennium Eye taking photographs at each one.

The following morning my stomach was in knots and I was really nervous. Doctors freak me out and the thoughts of having an operation were

nearly making me shit myself. I was freaking out that something was going to go wrong and my parents and relatives would find out. I really wanted a cigarette to calm my nerves but I wasn't allowed to have one. We took three or four trains and a taxi to get to the clinic for my appointment. There was an old guy standing outside the entrance of the clinic handing out anti-choice leaflets. I felt so angry when I saw him but I didn't say a word as I passed him. The waiting room in the clinic was packed. First of all I had an interview with a counsellor where I had to confirm that I wanted to have the abortion. Next I was brought to a doctor who interviewed me about my medical history and took a blood sample. I was then brought for an ultrasound which was probably the hardest part of the morning. I wanted to ask the doctor if I could see the scan photo up close but couldn't find the words. I signed lots of forms confirming that I definitely wanted to have the termination and remember thinking that I would definitely not change my mind about my decision.

I was then brought to a different part of the clinic where I waited to go to the theatre. There were two other Irish women in the waiting room. The activist in me really wanted to talk to them about how shit it was that we had to come all the way to a foreign country to have a termination but instead we just all sat in silence reading magazines. One woman was in her thirties and was accompanied by her partner and the other woman was in her forties and accompanied by a female friend. In 2005, a total of 5,585 women gave Irish addresses in clinics in the United Kingdom.

I had a surgical abortion under a general anaesthetic so I don't remember anything about the procedure itself. I only remember waking up from the anaesthetic and starting to cry. I sobbed uncontrollably but they weren't tears of regret or guilt, I was relieved that I wasn't pregnant anymore. I have never ever regretted the fact that I had an abortion. It wasn't an easy decision to make and sometimes I do wonder about how my life would have turned out if I'd continued with the pregnancy. On the Thursday night before I flew to London I had a conversation with my foetus. I said I wished circumstances were different and I apologised that I wasn't ready to have a baby.



Two and a half years later, I'm glad I had my abortion because it was the right decision for me. I have always been pro-choice but my experience made me realise how important pro-choice activism is. As an anarchist and a feminist I believe it is a fundamental right of every woman to decide for herself whether and when to bear children if she chooses to have children. Women in Ireland who choose to terminate a pregnancy should be able to access free, safe, and legal abortion services within Ireland.

*If you are in a crisis pregnancy situation, you should consider all your options - parenting, adoption and termination. If you would like to talk to a counsellor about your crisis pregnancy you can contact the Irish Family Planning Association on 1850 49 50 51 and make an appointment. You can contact BPAS from Ireland by calling 0044 121 450 7700.*

# ... Abortion Stories

## CIARA

Though I intend to have children someday, given a similar circumstance, I would make the same choice again. I do not feel guilt or remorse for choosing abortion, but I have felt grief over my silence.

I often think about the 17 women every day making arrangements to travel over to England. How they too have to lie to their bosses, their parents, their partners, scrounge for the money, feel the cloud of stigma and shame. Imagine if these women – all 120,000 and more since 1980, all chose to speak up at once about their experience – to break the silence – what kind of an uproarious noise that would be? I'm not ashamed of what I've been through. I am angry and saddened, though, that I had to hide so much from my friends and family. I am angry that I've been made to feel like I've done something wrong.

I became pregnant after sleeping with a guy I was friends with but had no real feelings for. It was the weekend of my birthday and I hadn't had a proper boyfriend in over a year, and I suppose I missed the closeness. I didn't want to sleep with him per se, but after a while I guess it just happened, even though I remember saying "no" about three times before I pretty much just said, "screw it." I wanted to feel sexy. I wanted to feel closeness. I suppose I wanted to feel loved.

We used a condom, which broke. I explained to him I'd have to take the morning after pill, as I wasn't quite sure where I was in my cycle. I had no money at the time and he told me he'd give me money the next day. We never got it together to meet so I borrowed from someone else, but by then I was into hour 50 (you have to take the morning after pill by 72 hours with decreased chance of efficiency the longer you leave it).

I assumed once I'd taken the morning after pill I'd be fine. But after two weeks of moaning my friend showed up at my door with a test. We sat around and waited. I went to the bathroom to check on the test and it was positive. I walked, shaking, terrified... into the sitting room where two of my girlfriends were waiting, and collapsed on the floor in tears.

After narrowly avoiding the Christian right-wing groups who try to talk girls out of their decision by showing them tapes of aborted fetuses, I finally found a clinic which gave me the phone numbers of British abortion clinics. I booked into the clinic for the following week. The decision wasn't made lightly but I was firm in my resolve not to proceed with the pregnancy. The guy would have been a totally rubbish boyfriend and father (and did admit this himself) and I knew I wasn't ready to have kids and would've been pretty damn rubbish myself. I had a lot of trauma in my life and knew I had barely gotten myself together, let alone be able to look after a child, one whom I



would resent and be unable to look after properly... I just knew in my gut I was doing the right thing. No one else could possibly have had the same insight into my situation, it was such a dramatically internal process – the decision – the fact that here we legislate against it beggars belief.

I made the trip to England with a friend. I confided in one person because I needed her to lend me the money. It cost about €1,500 altogether because of flights, accommodation and the procedure. I was on the dole and skint. If I hadn't had my friend to confide in, I don't know what would have happened. The whole way over on the plane I repeated over and over – 'please let me be doing the right thing, please let this be the right decision' – to whom I was talking I don't know.

I had a medical termination at five weeks. I opted for a medical abortion over a surgical one because I'm nervous about general anaesthetic, and I wanted to be connected with the process. I sometimes regret having a medical termination. It would have been different if I had been at home – a totally different experience. But it was difficult in the hospital. I went to the surgery and after going through the scans and check-ups I was given pills. I then came back after two days and was given more pills, and pessaries. The nausea was excruciating, the pain unbearable... I wouldn't have minded the pain in a different environment. Hours of packing up and down the ward. Chronic diarrhoea. Having to bring everything that comes out of my body up 2 flights of stairs to be inspected and trawled through by nurses. Having to write my name on the side of the carton I had to shit and bleed in. Walking up two flights of stairs with my carton full of blood and shit with my name scrawled across it... up and down the stairs maybe 10 times... maybe more. I cried and cried with the humiliation of it. It's times like these you really feel small, and human, and vulnerable.

Sitting alone in the toilet for what felt like the hundredth time, I knew it had happened. You just know. I didn't need to have had the nurse trawl through everything I passed that day. And I carefully carried the carton up the stairs, past nurses, doctors, patients... staring inside at the contents of my abortion. How different would it have been if it happened at home? I would have had privacy, dignity and respect. I could've had support and comfort from my friends. I wouldn't have felt so isolated.

I don't feel guilty. Sometimes I feel guilty for not feeling guilty, and have internalised some of the shame which comes with an illegal activity. I am never regretful and am actually glad of having the experience, as it changed me. It turned me into a woman – I realised my pro-creative power. It made me even more vehemently pro-choice, feminist, full of self-respect, and inspired me to make the most of the decision I made for me.

While abortion remains illegal in Ireland, thousands of Irish women every year are forced to travel to foreign countries to exercise their rights. The Dutch feminist group "Women on Waves" visited our shores in June 2001 in the so called abortion ship, *Aurora*, highlighting the need for essential abortion services. They have since travelled to other countries with prohibitive abortion laws, providing services for a few women and sparking public debate on the issue. To directly help more women, they set up the multi-lingual website Women on Web as a means to provide medical abortion pills to those worldwide who are unable to access abortion services.

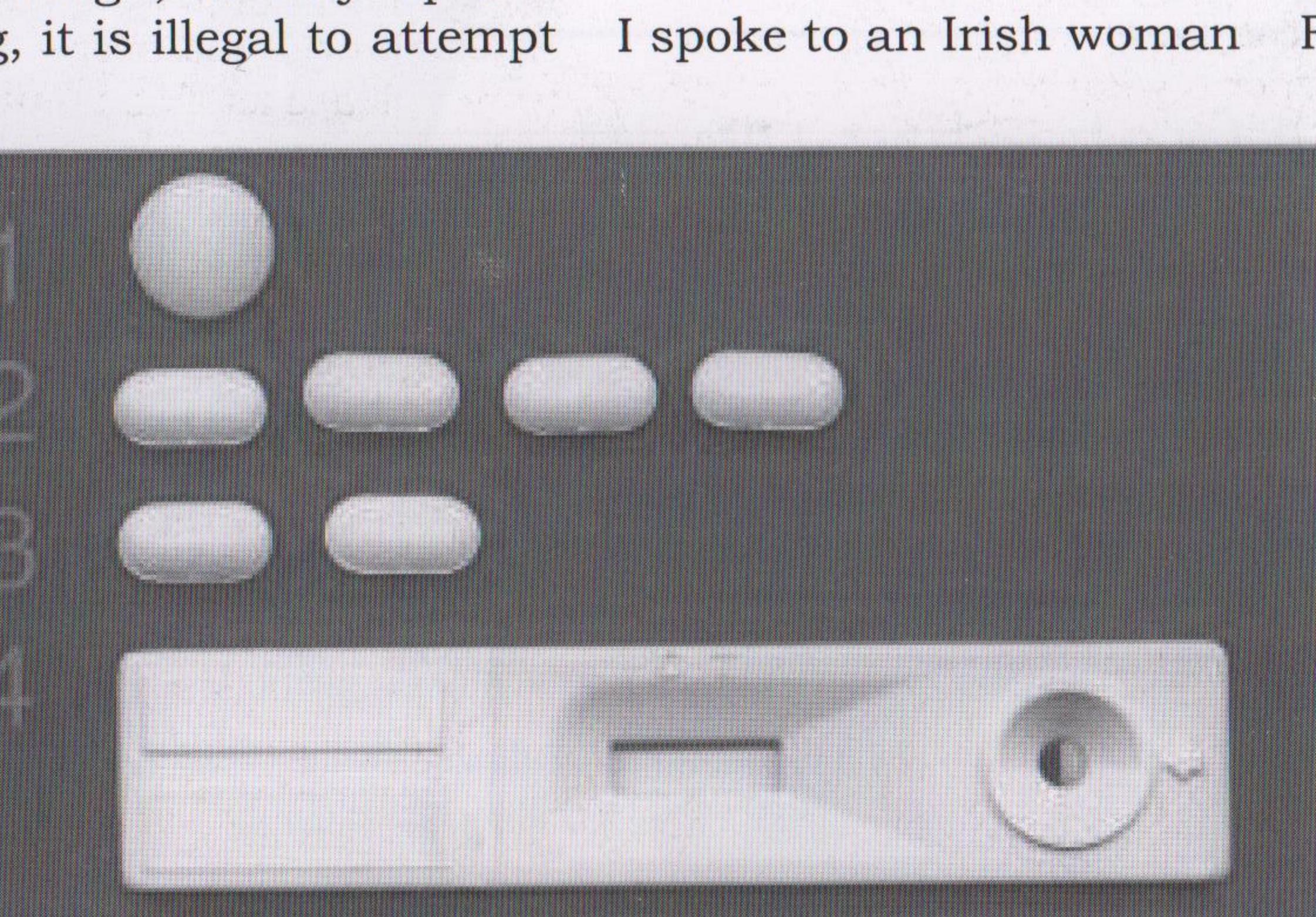
The medical abortion uses a combination of two different drugs

– Mifeprisone (RU486) and Misoprostol. They act to stop the production of progesterone (the hormone which sustains pregnancy) and to bring on cramps and bleeding where an early pregnancy (up to 9 weeks) will be terminated. If used correctly, the drugs are 98% effective.

On the website, there is an online consultation where a woman must answer twenty five in-depth questions regarding her health, pregnancy, support, distance to medical care etc. This information

is then submitted to a doctor who decides whether she can be provided with the pills.

The pills, along with a pregnancy test, are sent to the woman's home address in a clearly marked package. It is not illegal to import the medicines in this way for personal use. Although, strictly speaking, it is illegal to attempt



**Do you have an unwanted pregnancy? Click here.**

an abortion in Ireland, the likelihood of a woman being caught or prosecuted for doing so is extremely low. In the event of the need for hospital treatment (eg if there is excessive bleeding), the website advises the woman to state that she has had a miscarriage.

There is a follow-up email consultation with the woman 2-3 weeks afterwards. Also on the site are clear yet in-depth FAQ and medical references for those considering using the service or finding out more about it. The total

cost to the woman is a 70 euro donation.

A part of the website is given over to personal testimony – where women share their own experiences to break the silence and stigma surrounding abortion. As yet there are only three Irish testimonies on the site.

I spoke to an Irish woman

ethical grounds would not oppose the introduction of medical abortion here – as it eliminates arguments on late-term abortions. However, with the excuse of making the process safer, it would probably become an institutionalised experience, forcing women to stay in hospital for the duration.

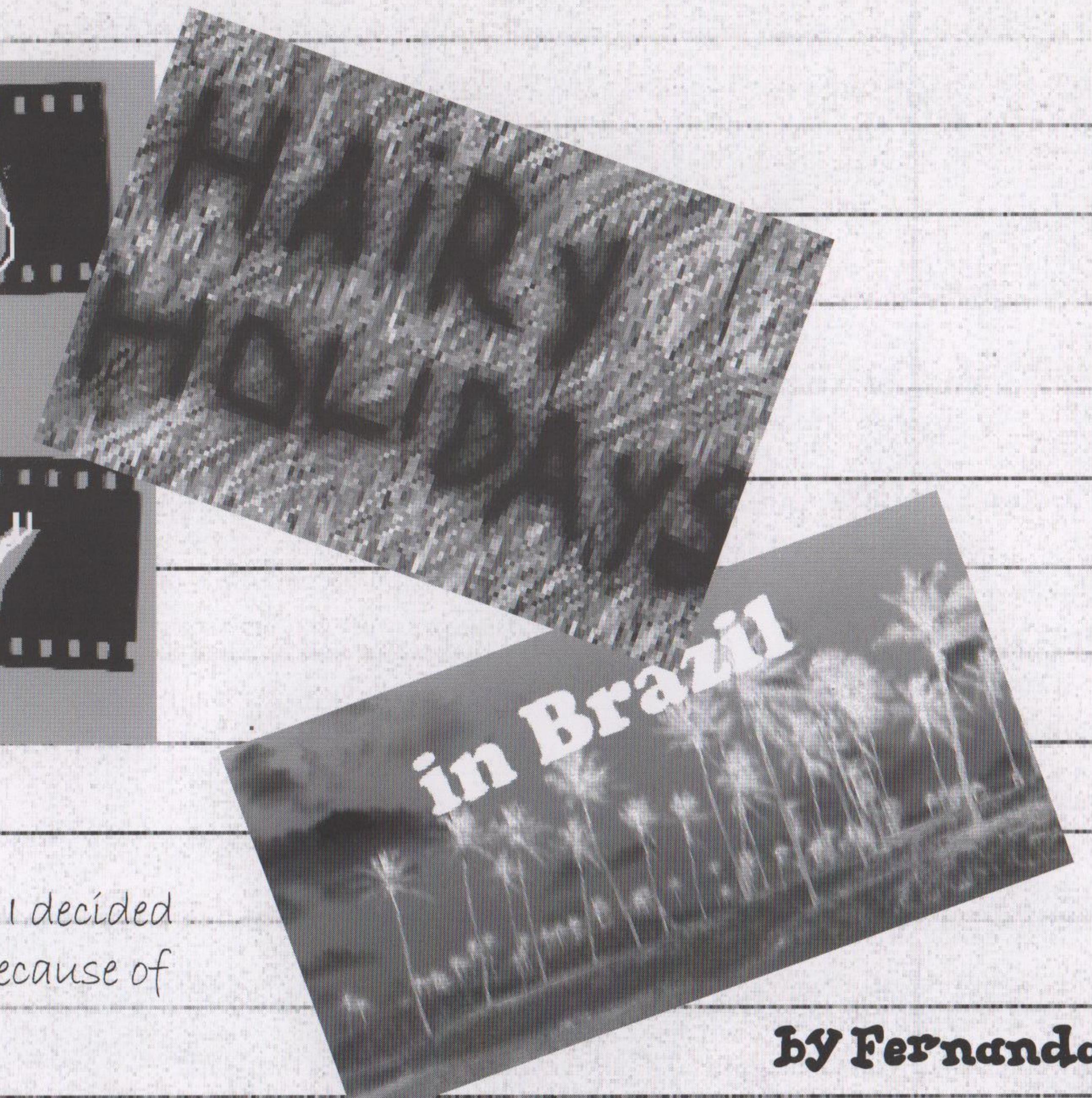
For women who know about this service it can mean less travel, less expense, more support and less trauma. For those who would otherwise attempt unsafe abortions it is literally lifesaving. Publicising the service is tricky as many pro-choice groups don't wish to be associated with that which operates outside the law and strict regulation. Away from the protection of medical patriarchy, the onus is on each woman who chooses to use the service to take absolute responsibility for her own health and well-being during the process.

[www.womenonweb.org](http://www.womenonweb.org)

*RAG recommends you avoid unexpected pregnancy by practicing safe sex (contraceptives have been legal in Ireland since 1979, and condoms only available "over-the counter" since 1992!)*

*If you do have unprotected sex, you can take emergency contraception – the "morning-after pill" – within 72 hours of intercourse (licensed in Ireland in 2001)*

# PHOTO STORY



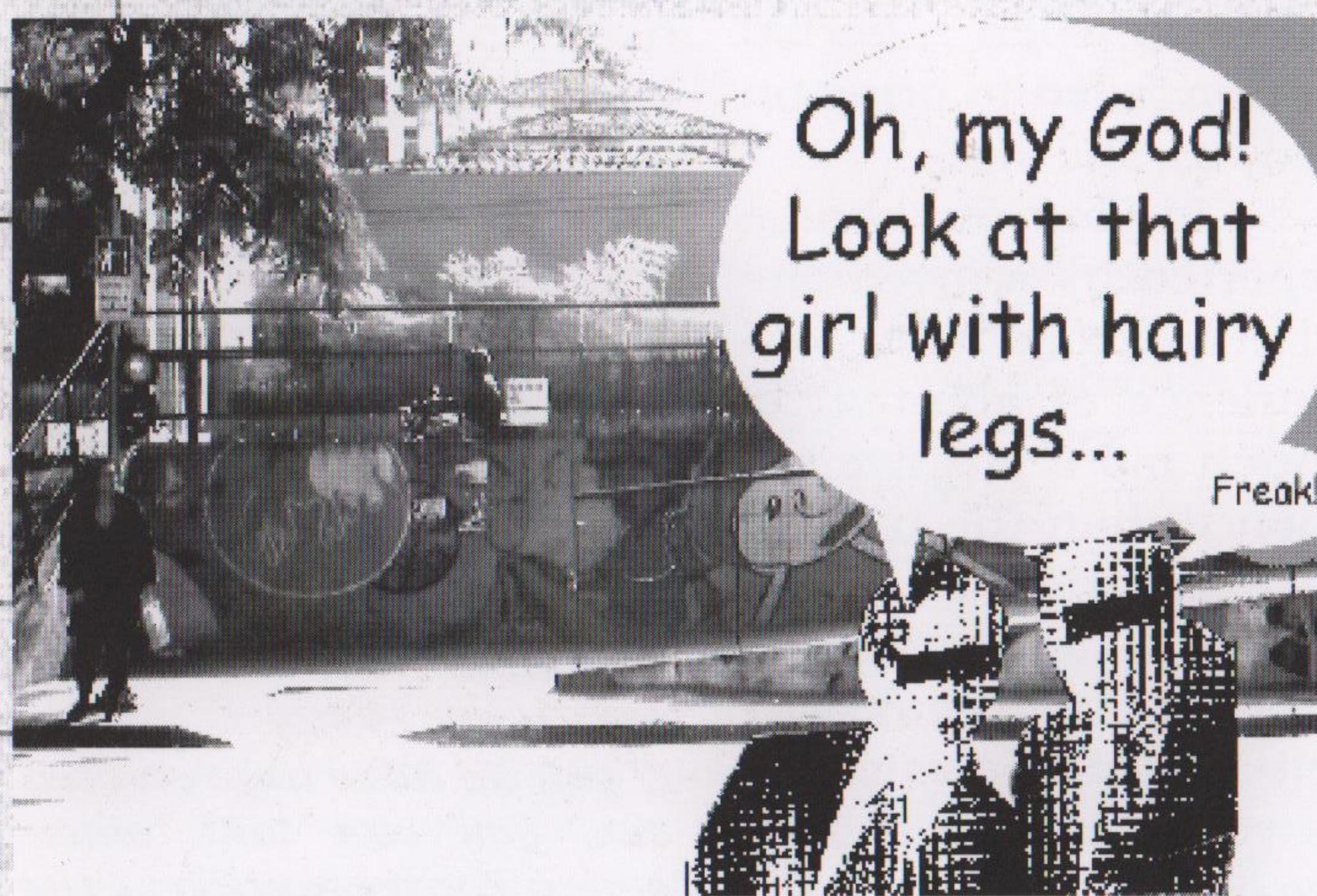
After thinking about it for a long time, I decided to stop shaving and waxing my body because of the following reasons:

Hair is something natural that keeps growing all the time so why should I bother wasting my precious time shaving it off.

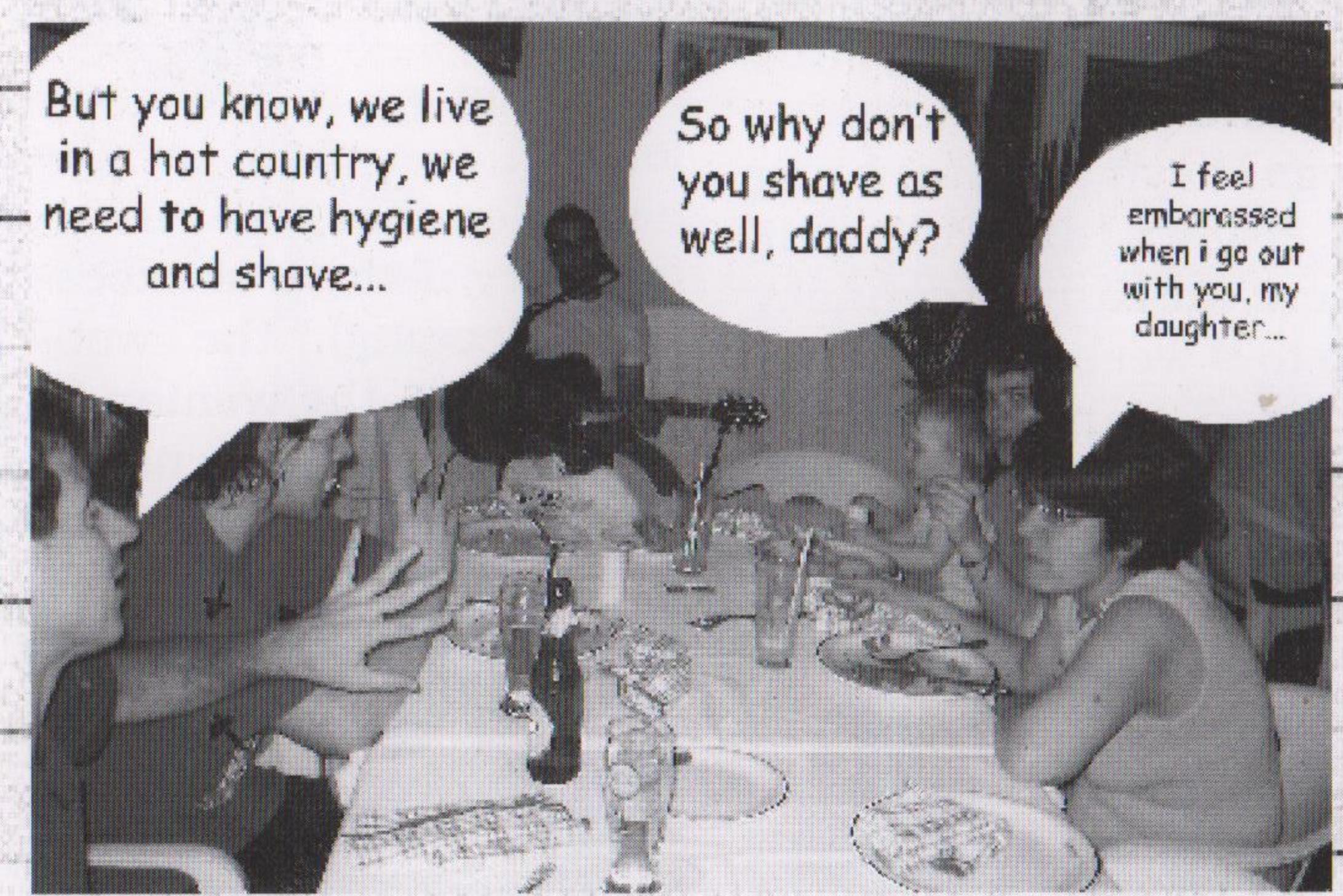
The reason why I started to shave myself in puberty was because I used to feel embarrassed about the transformation that was happening to my body.

Because I never used to see women with hairy bodies anywhere (magazines, television, streets, family, school, etc).

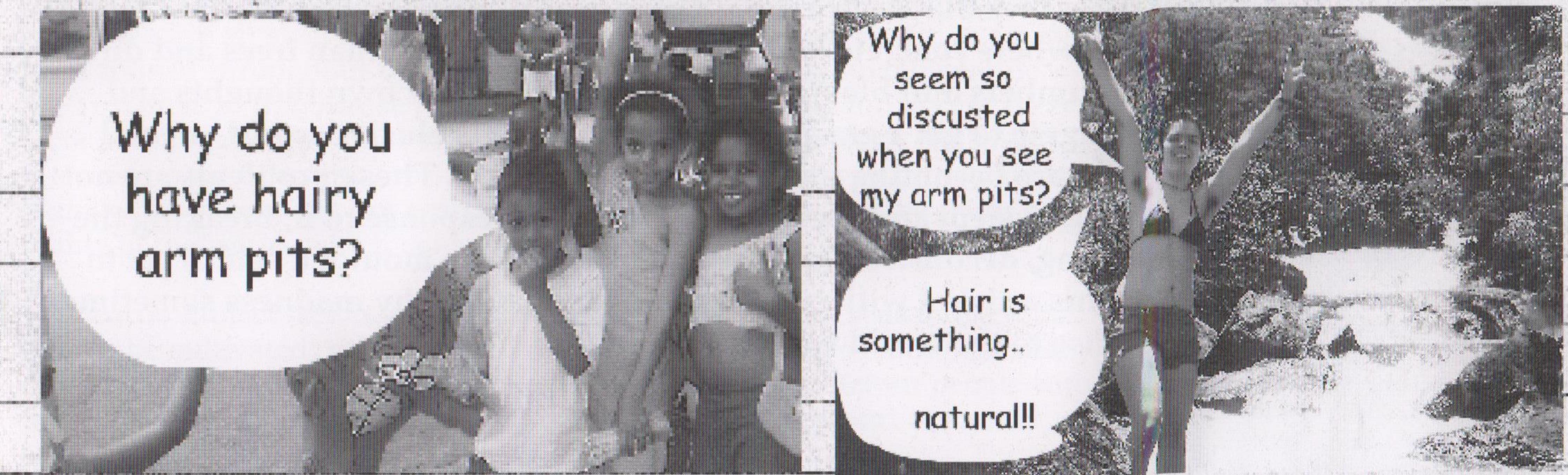
If men don't need to shave in our society and they are pretty hairy, why do women have to be hairless?



Two men in the street

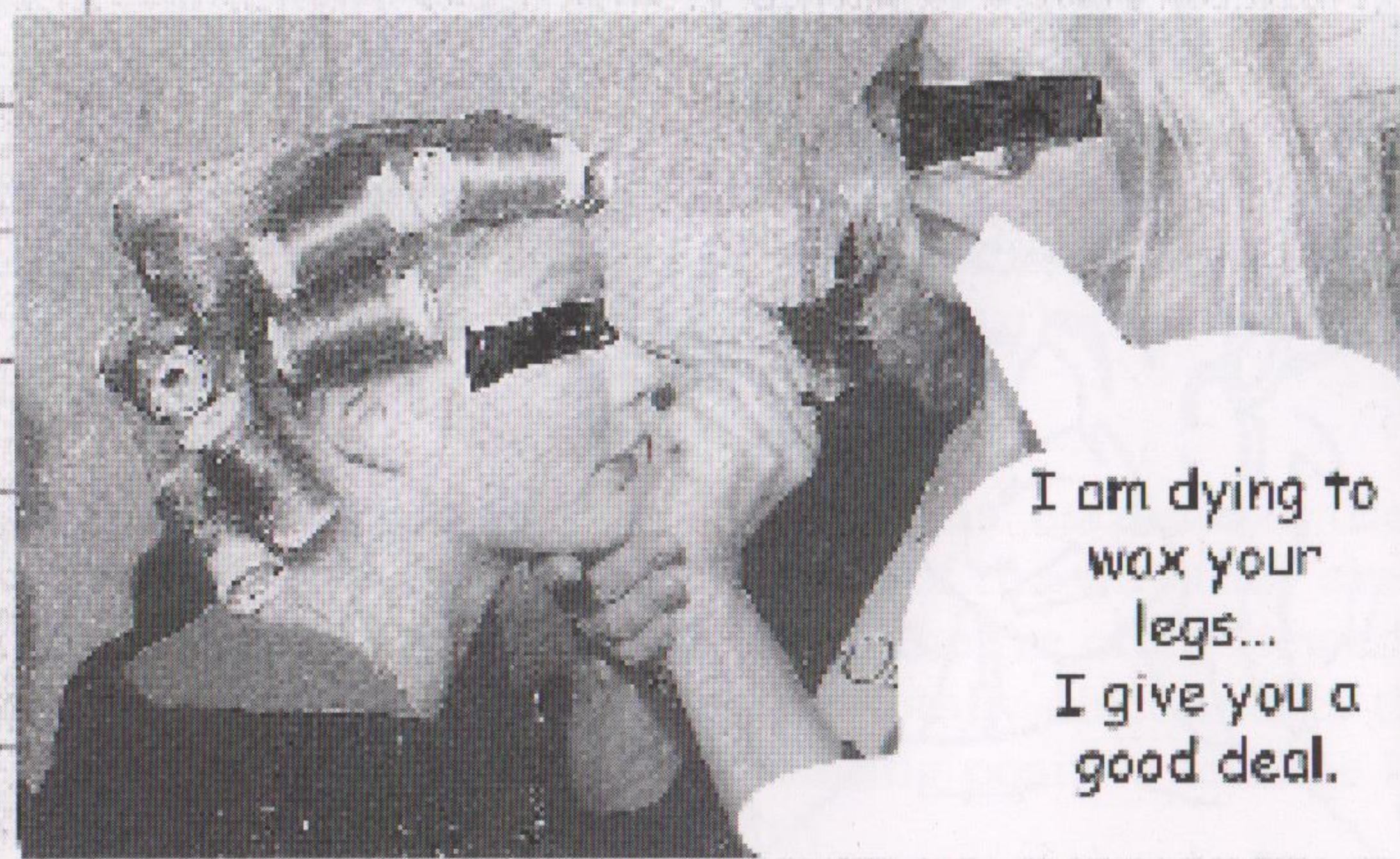


Family dinner

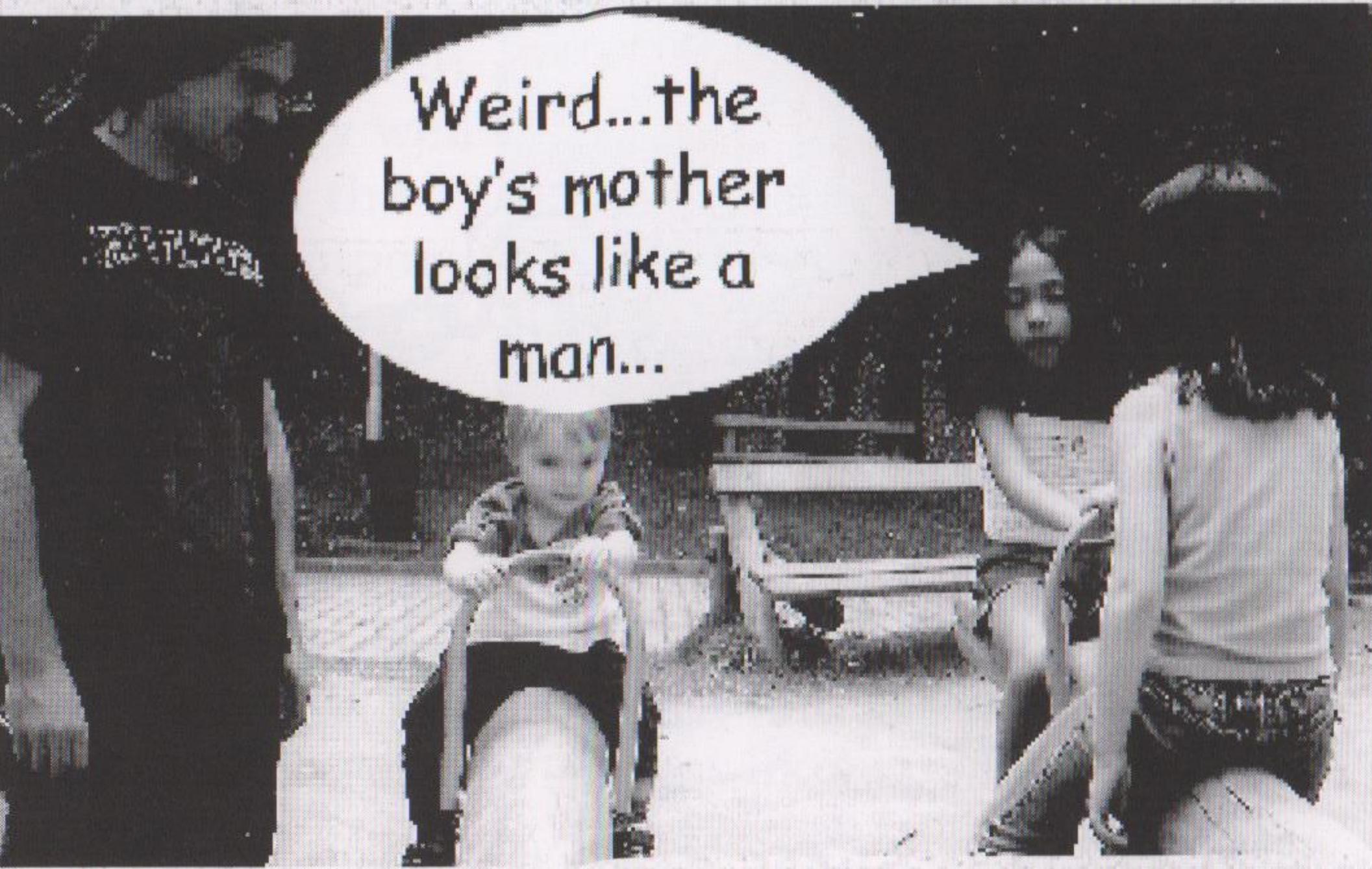


Kids on a street

Someone taking a photo of me at the waterfall



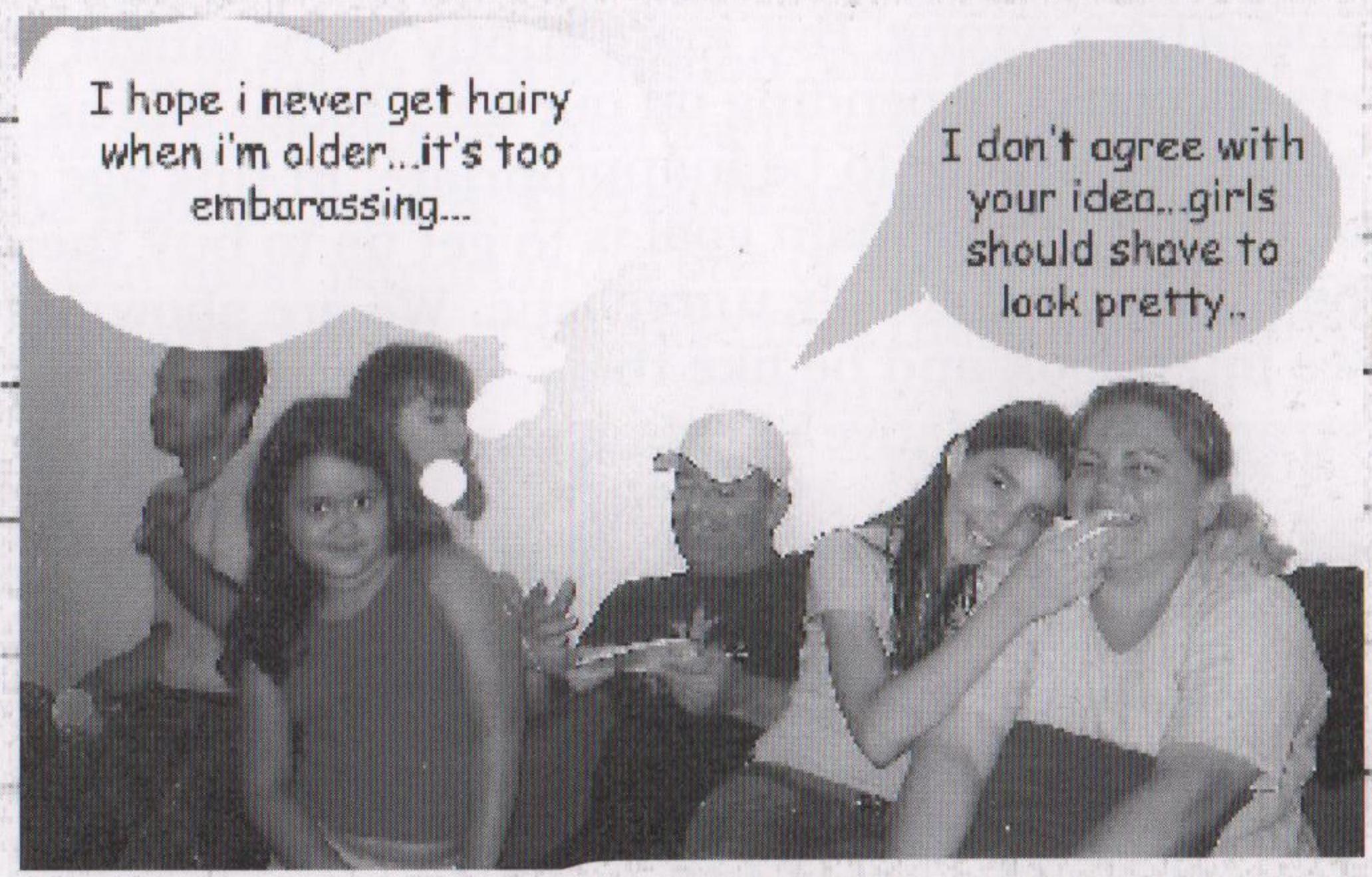
Beauty salon



Kid's at the playground



My cousin on Christmas day



In my granny's house

ALL THE SCENES AND SITUATIONS IN THIS PHOTO STORY ARE REAL!!

The goals of the modern world revolve around consumption and economic gain, equating happiness with money, putting little significance on natural or tangible things in life. We are led into a maze where we build our lives on man-made "webs of significance"\*. We dwell in a false reality, where concrete and plastic seems more real than trees and dirt; where binary systems of numbers and beeps are more valid than our own thoughts and ideas. As many people struggle to get a grasp on their place in this elusive world, mental health problems and issues are becoming more and more common. These problems are not only a negative effect of this system and society, but a positive response to it; breaking the chains of social programming, deconstructing the artificial, socially moulded self to get to one's core or true self. In this article I will explore some ideas as to why madness sometimes seems like the sane response to the world we're living in.

## are you fucking mental!?

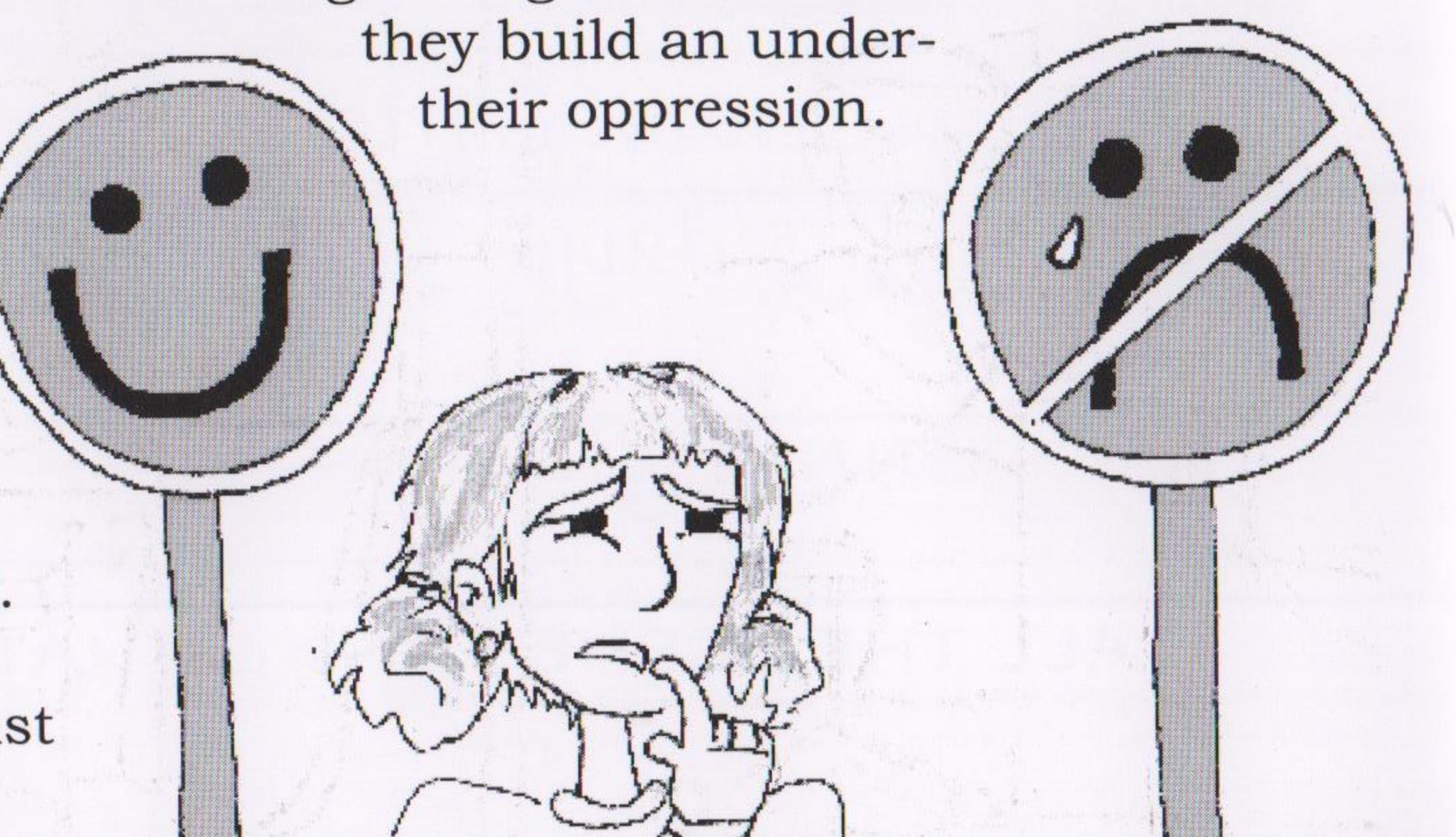


words by sinéad, images by karen harte

From the day we are born, we are moulded to fit a certain template, particularly that of a productive citizen. We are trained to act, think and feel a certain way. We are told that certain ways of behaving are right and others wrong. But more subtly we're taught that certain emotions and thoughts are correct and others incorrect depending on our age, social status, gender etc. So we suppress those thoughts and feelings which we believe to be inappropriate. In this age of high-mass consumerism, corporate agendas dominate our world. Their main goal is to get us to buy their product, but their methods preach a way of living and being which is totally unrealistic. We are shown ideal human models 'shiny happy people' and are told that we must look and be like them. This compartmentalisation not only happens on a surface level, but has a strong manipulative effect on our mental and emotional states.

Little time is given in school for personal development. Feelings and emotions are the first things we experience in ourselves and in this world, before language or thought. They are the most intense and real part of ourselves, yet we learn the opposite. In the concept of reality which we are taught, feelings are not tangibly real. We cannot see, taste, touch, smell or hear them so they mustn't exist. The older we get the more we develop our language and thought, the less weight we give to our feelings, the more we push down and disregard them, the more ground resistance to eventually rise-up and revolt against

Extreme mental or emotional anguish can often be a product of heightened empathy and an ultimate act of hidden rebellion. It is the complete refusal to accept life as it is. It stands on a core feeling of unease and confusion which could stem from the fact that we are so far removed from our natural life that we have lost our place in the world. Or that we spend our lives working not for food or water, or for something tangible like gold, or even slips of paper but just



numbers on a screen which somehow ensure our security and survival. Or the fact that so many people die each day for the sake of profit and greed. We are all aware of these absurdities of the modern world, but we've been trained throughout our whole lives to become numb to our instinctive response to it, because if we were to honestly absorb and accept these facts about our world and our lives we couldn't cope, the dark reality of the world would become over-poweringly strong, and we would breakdown. Many of those who do, are searching for more, searching for the truth and reality of the world, which consumer society does not present.

The Icarus Project (see text box) speaks of 'mental illnesses' as dangerous gifts to be cultivated, rather than a disease to be destroyed. Although many different circumstances and personalities create many different people with many different emotional issues, all those who suffer any sort of mental anguish have been given a key to uncensored sides of themselves. They have been given the opportunity to journey through their own darkness to liberate themselves fully from their own demons and know themselves; to touch the fire that holds the fine line between madness and genius, where creativity lies. Humans are creatures of duality. We experience pain and pleasure, happiness and sadness, love and hate. Why should we deny a whole half of our being? What if diving into your own darkness is meant to be a fundamental part of human life? To see what's down there, to experience and embrace despair and all the other icky emotions we've learned to fear. What if we've only been trained to think that we should be happy well-adjusted creatures? Because the productivity that would be lost and the intelligence and strength that would emerge from self-realised and empowered individuals would too greatly disturb the balance of power and profit on which our society rests.

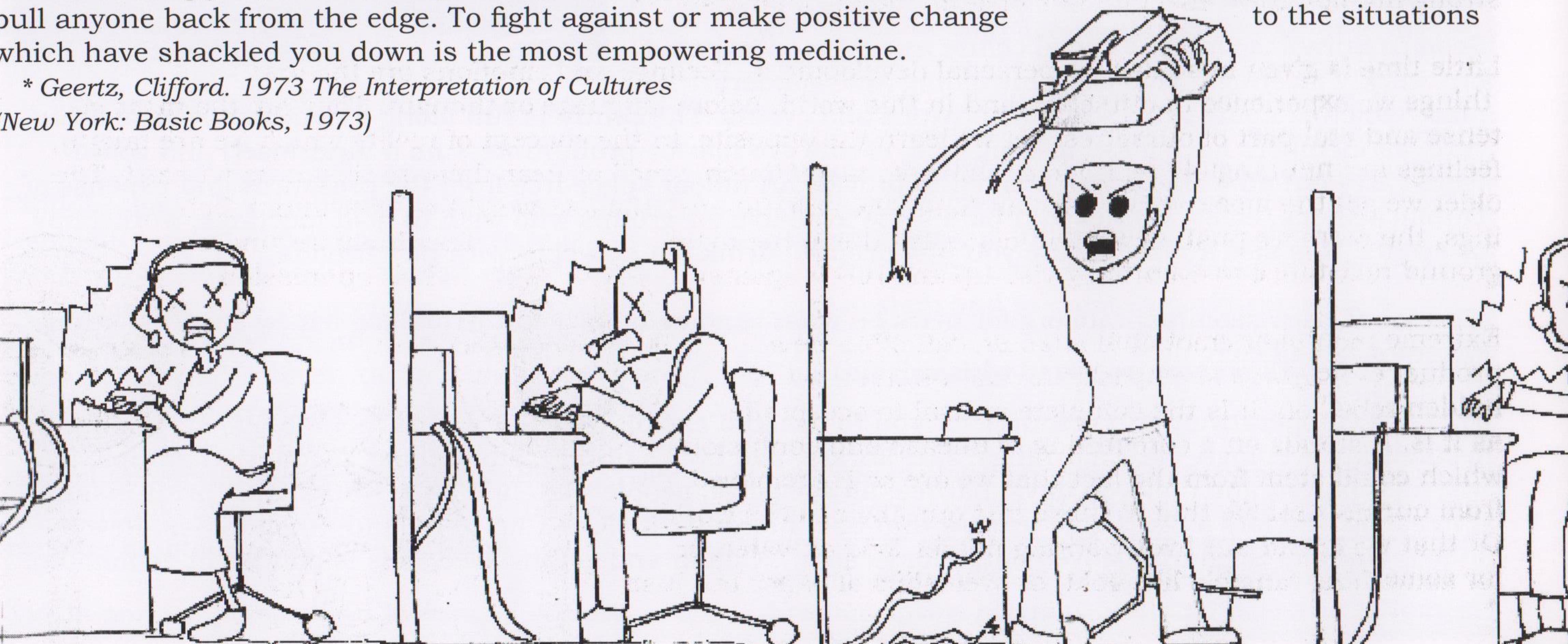
One reason why some 'mental illnesses' escalate to the severity and intensity that they do, could be because of the way they are perceived by society and treated by the health system. They're often viewed as external sickness and diseases, and those who are 'afflicted' are victims. This stance totally disconnects the 'sufferer' from their feelings and themselves. It disempowers them further from making positive change in their own life, which is most likely part of the cause of their frustration to begin with.

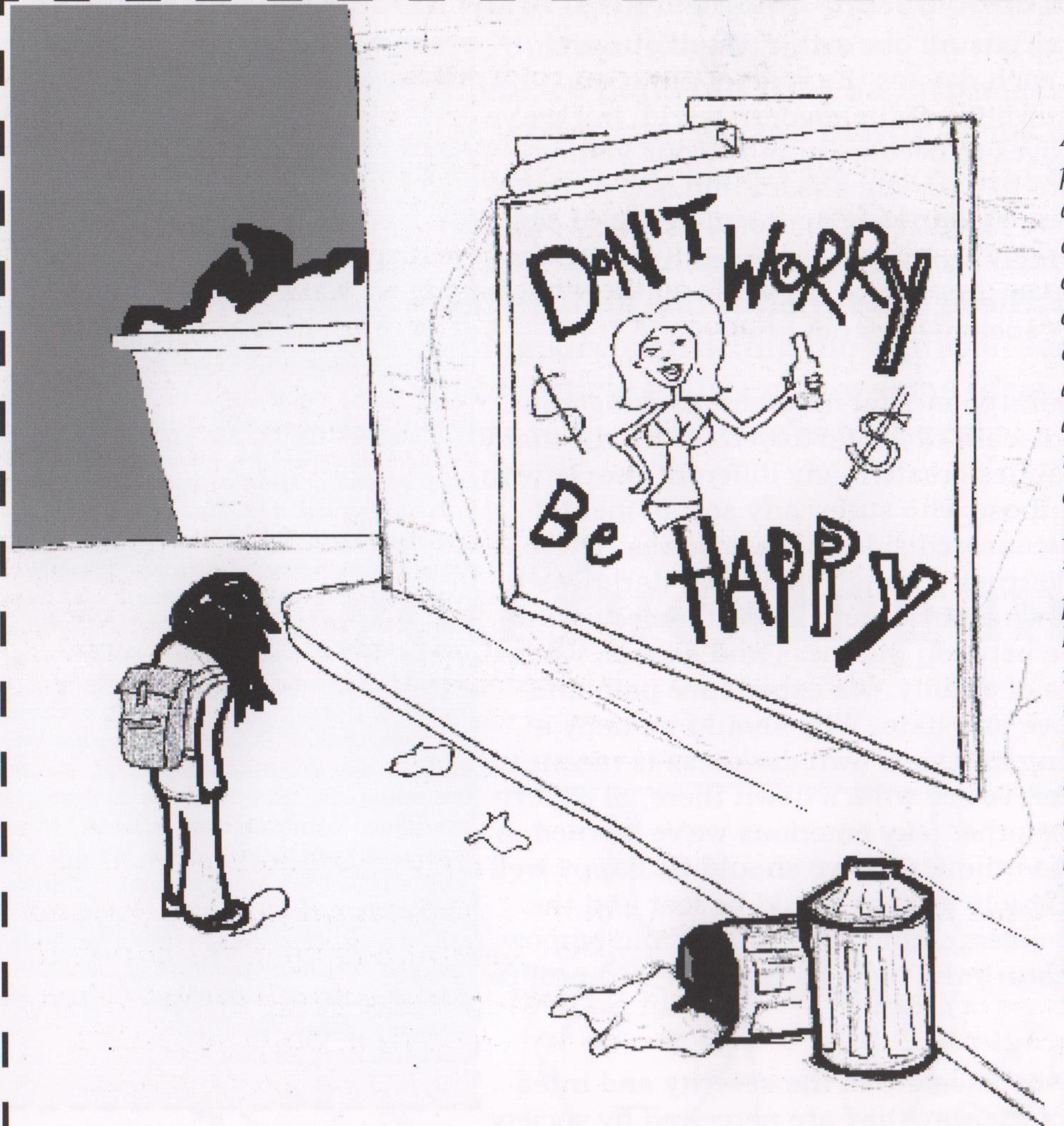
Mental anguish is on the rise; as the world gets crazier, people are finding it more and more difficult to cope. The solution lies within community. Radical communities in particular need to be aware and understanding of this process for several reasons. Having a greater social conscience and awareness of just how fucked up the world is, can leave you more vulnerable to the emotional effect of this reality. If we view mental 'problems' as a result of trying to break out of societal constraints, then it's going to be a common occurrence within a community that is focussed around resistance. As anarchists or libertarians, internal liberation or freedom from your own demons and limitations should be held in the highest regard. Therefore anyone battling with theirs should be strongly supported within our community. But most importantly, one of the most effective ways of easing the process is to get active and externalise the battle within. To realise that there are genuine chains binding you, there are legitimate reasons for your madness and frustration is enough to pull anyone back from the edge. To fight against or make positive change which have shackled you down is the most empowering medicine.

\* Geertz, Clifford. 1973 *The Interpretation of Cultures*  
(New York: Basic Books, 1973)

**The Icarus Project** is a radical mental health collective based in the United States. They support and empower each other by taking control of their own lives and taking action to change the world around them. The following is taken from their mission statement:

*The Icarus Project envisions a new culture and language that resonates with our actual experiences of 'mental illness' rather than trying to fit our lives into a conventional framework. We believe we have a dangerous gift to be cultivated and taken care of, rather than a disease or disorder to be suppressed or eliminated. By joining together as individuals and as a community, the intertwined threads of madness and creativity can inspire hope and transformation in a repressed and damaged world. We recognise that we live in a crazy world, and insist that our sensitivities, visions, and inspirations are not necessarily symptoms of illness. We call for more options in understanding and treating emotional distress, and we believe that everyone, regardless of income, should have access to these choices. We bring the Icarus vision to reality through a national staff collective and a grassroots network of autonomous local groups which facilitate a website, distribute publications, engage in advocacy, share skills, support, listen, create and change.*  
[www.theicarusproject.net](http://www.theicarusproject.net).





As part of the preparation for the previous article, RAG held an open discussion on mental health in radical communities. It was an extremely enlightening and ground-breaking evening which left everyone involved charged and inspired to take further action towards creating community awareness around the issue. One action which was talked about is the continuation of a dublin zine 'This Frantic Silence'. This Frantic Silence #1 was a DIY zine about issues of depression, anxiety, suicide and mental health compiled from anonymous submissions from different people. Issue #2 will have a focus on dealing with these issues, both collectively and personally, coping strategies and stories, all mediums welcome, art, writing, photos etc. They're currently looking for submissions, all of which will be kept anonymous. For more information or to submit articles please contact eric at direwolf@riseup.net

## seomra Spraoi

4 Mary's Abbey, Dublin 1 (just off Capel St, turn at the Boar's Head pub, along the red Luas track)

Seomra Spraoi is Dublin's social centre and where RAG hold our weekly meetings. This is an intriguing and wonderful place which is home to all sorts of activities and events. The centre is run along a non-hierarchical structure, all members have a say in decisions, events are not-for-profit (unless its a fundraiser) and volunteers carry out all work. It was created to provide an indoor space free from the pressures and expense of Dublin's shops, cafes, venues and bars. It is available for groups who wish to hold meetings, workshops or events. It is also a place where you just drop in, drink tea and chat with new friends.

Check out [www.seomraspraoi.org](http://www.seomraspraoi.org) for news on what is going on or join the mailing list by emailing [seomraspraoi@gmail.com](mailto:seomraspraoi@gmail.com)

This is a co-operatively run resource for you to use and exploit. Regular events include film screenings on Wednesday evenings, craft mornings, zine library, bad books library, storytelling, discussion groups, free Internet, parent and children days, parties, all ages gigs, people's kitchen, bike workshops, print-making, a freeshop and lots more. Other groups that use the centre include Choice Ireland, Shell to Sea, Revolt Video, Workers Solidarity Movement, Gluaiseacht....Call in and get involved, this is politics in action!

words by Deirdre, images by UMLEM\* and Pepe

It is quite common these days to hear criticisms of "mainstream" or "middle-class" feminism from anarchists or others on the revolutionary, and even the not-so-revolutionary, left. In particular, anarchists are often quick to criticise any feminist analysis that lacks a class analysis. This article argues that feminism in its own right is worth fighting for and that when it comes to ending sexism an insistence on always emphasising class can end up merely distracting from the fact that as anarchists we need to be unambiguous when it comes to supporting feminism. Rather than distancing ourselves from other feminists or seeking always to qualify our support, our emphasis should shift to developing and promoting our own brand of anarchist feminism.

### The relationship between class society and capitalism

The defining feature of capitalist society is that it is broadly divided into two fundamental classes: the capitalist class (the bourgeoisie), made up of large business owners, and the working class (the proletariat), consisting more or less of everyone else - the vast majority of people who work for a wage. There are, of course, plenty of grey areas within this definition of class society, and the working class itself is not made up of one homogenous group of people, but includes, for example, unskilled labourers as well as most of what is commonly termed the middle-class and there can, therefore, be very real differences in income and opportunity for different sectors of this broadly defined working class

"Middle class" is a problematic term as, although frequently used, who exactly it refers to is rarely very clear. Usually "middle class" refers to workers such as independent professionals, small business owners and lower and middle management. However, these middle layers are not really an independent class, in that they are not independent of the process of exploitation and capital accumulation which is capitalism. They are generally at the fringes of one of the two main classes, capitalist and working class.[1]

The important point about looking at society

as consisting of two fundamental classes is the understanding that the economic relationship between these two classes, the big business owners and the people who work for them, is based on exploitation and therefore these two classes have fundamentally opposing material interests.

Capitalism and business are, by nature, profit driven. The work an employee does in the course of their job creates wealth. Some of this wealth is given to the employee in their wage-packet, the rest is kept by the boss, adding to his or her profits (if an employee were not profitable, they would not be employed). In this way, the business owner exploits the employee and accumulates capital. It is in the interests of the business owner to maximise profits and to keep the cost of wages down; it is in the interests of the employee to maximise their pay and conditions. This conflict of interest and the exploitation of one class of people by another minority class, is inherent to capitalist society. Anarchists aim ultimately to abolish the capitalist class system and to create a classless society.

### The relationship between sexism and capitalism

Sexism is a source of injustice which differs from the type of class exploitation mentioned above in a few different ways. Most women live and work with men for at least some of their lives; they have close relationships with men, such as their father, son, brother, lover, partner, husband or friend. Women

22

23



many aspects of sexism eroded away in time with struggle, there are features of capitalism that make the full economic equality of women and men under capitalism highly unlikely. This is because capitalism is based on the need to maximise profits and in such a system women are at a natural disadvantage.

In capitalist society, the ability to give birth is a liability. Women's biological role means that (if they have children) they will have to take at least some time off paid employment. Their biological role also makes them ultimately responsible for any child they bear. In consequence, paid maternity leave, single parent allowance, parental leave, leave to care for sick children, free crèche and childcare facilities etc. will always be especially relevant to women. For this reason women are economically more vulnerable than men under capitalism: attacks on gains such as crèche facilities, single-parent allowance and so on will always affect women disproportionately more than men. And yet without full economic equality it is hard to see an end to the unequal power relations between

women and men and the associated ideology of sexism. Thus, although we can say that capitalism could accommodate women's equality with men, the reality is that the full realisation of this equality is very unlikely to be achieved under capitalism. This is simply because there is an economic penalty linked to women's biology which makes profit-driven capitalist society inherently biased against women.

and men do not have *inherently* opposing interests; we do not want to abolish the sexes but instead to abolish the hierarchy of power that exists between the sexes and to create a society where women and men can live freely and equally together.

Capitalist society depends on class exploitation. It does not though *depend* on sexism and could in theory accommodate to a large extent a similar treatment of women and men. This is obvious if we look at what the fight for women's liberation has achieved in many societies around the world over the last, say, 100 years, where there has been radical improvements in the situation of women and the underlying assumptions of what roles are natural and right for women. Capitalism, in the mean time, has adapted to women's changing role and status in society.

An end to sexism therefore won't necessarily lead to an end to capitalism. Likewise, sexism can continue even after capitalism and class society have been abolished. Sexism is possibly the earliest form of oppression ever to exist, it not only pre-dates capitalism; there is evidence that sexism also pre-dates earlier forms of class society [2]. As societies have developed the exact nature of women's oppression, the particular form it takes, has changed. Under capitalism the oppression of women has its own particular character where capitalism has taken advantage of the historical oppression of women to maximise profits.

But how realistic is the end of women's oppression under capitalism? There are many ways in which women are oppressed as a sex in today's society – economically, ideologically, physically, and so on – and it is likely that continuing the feminist struggle will lead to further improvements in the condition of women. However, though it is possible to envisage



### **The struggle for women's emancipation in working class movements**

One of the best examples of how struggle for change can bring about real and lasting changes in society is the great improvements in women's status, rights and quality of life that the struggle for women's liberation has achieved in many countries around the globe. Without this struggle (which I'll call feminism though not all those fighting against women's subordination would have identified as feminist), women clearly would not have made the huge gains we have made.

Historically, the struggle for women's emancipation was evident within anarchist and other socialist movements. However, as a whole, these movements have tended to have a somewhat ambiguous relationship with women's liberation and the

broader feminist struggle.

Although central to anarchism has always been an emphasis on the abolition of all hierarchies of power, anarchism has its roots in class struggle, in the struggle to overthrow capitalism, with its defining aim being the creation of a classless society. Because women's oppression is not so intimately tied to capitalism as class struggle, women's liberation has historically been seen, and to a large extent continues to be seen, as a secondary goal to the creation of a classless society, not as important nor as fundamental as class struggle.

But to whom is feminism unimportant? Certainly for most women in socialist movements the assumption that a profound transformation in the power relations between women and men was part of socialism was vital. However, there tended to be more men than women active in socialist circles and the men played a dominant role. Women's demands were marginalised because of the primacy of class and also because while the issues that

affected working men also affected working women in a similar way, the same was not true for the issues particular to the oppression of women as a sex. Women's social and economic equality was sometimes seen to conflict with the material interests and comforts of men. Women's equality required profound changes in the division of labour both in the home and at work as well as changes in the whole social system of male authority. To

achieve women's equality a re-evaluation of self-identity would also have to take place where "men's identity" could no longer depend on being seen as stronger or more capable than women.

Women tended to make the connection between personal and political emancipation, hoping that socialism would make new women and new men by democratising all aspects of human relations. However they found it very hard, for example, to convince their comrades that the unequal division of labour within the home was an important political issue. In the words of Hannah Mitchell, active as a socialist and feminist around the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in England, on her double shift working both outside and inside the home:

*"Even my Sunday leisure was gone for I soon found a lot of the socialist talk about freedom*



*was only talk and these socialist young men expected Sunday dinners and huge teas with home-made cakes, potted meats and pies exactly like their reactionary fellows."* [3]

Anarchist women in Spain at the time of the social revolution in 1936 had similar complaints finding that female-male equality did not carry over well to intimate personal relationships. Martha Ackelsberg notes in her book *Free Women of Spain* that although equality for women and men was adopted officially by the Spanish anarchist movement as early as 1872:

*"Virtually all of my informants lamented that no matter how militant even the most committed anarchists were in the streets, they expected to be 'masters' in their homes – a complaint echoed in many articles written in movement newspapers and magazines during this period."*

Sexism also occurred in the public sphere, where, for example, women militants sometimes found they were not treated seriously nor with respect by their male comrades. Women also faced problems in their struggle for equality within the trade union movement in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries where the unequal situation of men and women in paid employment was an awkward issue. Men in the trade unions argued that women lowered the wages of organised workers and some believed the solution was to exclude women entirely from the trade and to raise the male wage so that the men could support their families. In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century in Britain a tailor summarised the effect of female labour as follows:

*"When I first began working at this branch [waistcoat-making], there were but very few females employed in it. A few white waist-*



focused on class struggle. I emphasise the point because though today the anarchist movement as a whole does support an end to the oppression of women, there remains a mistrust of feminism, with anarchists and other socialists sometimes distancing themselves from feminism because it often lacks a class analysis. Yet it is this very feminism that we have to thank for the very real gains women have made.

#### How relevant is class when it comes to sexism?

What are the common approaches to feminism by class-struggle anarchists today? On the extreme end of reaction against feminism is the complete class-reductionist point of view: Only class matters. This dogmatic viewpoint tends to see feminism as divisive [surely sexism is more divisive than feminism?] and a distraction from class struggle and holds that any sexism that does exist will disappear automatically with the end of capitalism and class society.

However, a more common anarchist approach to feminism is the acceptance that sexism does exist, will not automatically fade away with the end of capitalism and needs to be fought against in the here and now. Nevertheless, as previously mentioned, anarchists are often at pains to distance themselves from "mainstream" feminism because of its lack of class analysis. Instead, it is stressed that the experience of sexism is differentiated by class and that therefore women's oppression is a class issue. It is certainly true that wealth mitigates to some extent the effect of sexism: It is less difficult, for example, to obtain an abortion if you do not have to worry about raising the money for the trip abroad; issues of who does the bulk of the housework and childcare become less important if you can afford to pay someone else to help. Also, depending on your socio-economic background you will have different priorities.

However, in constantly stressing that experience of sexism is differentiated by class, anarchists can seem to gloss over or ignore that which is also true: that experience of class is differentiated by sex. The problem, the injustice, of sexism is that there are unequal relations between women and men within the working class and indeed in the whole of society. Women are always at a disadvantage to men of their respective class. To a greater or lesser extent sexism affects women of all classes; yet a feminist analysis that does not emphasise class is the often target of criticism. But is class relevant to all aspects of sexism? How is class relevant to sexual violence, for example? Class is certainly not always the most important point in any case. Sometimes there is an insistence on tacking on a class analysis to every feminist position as if this is needed to give feminism credibility, to validate it as a worthy struggle for class-struggle anarchists. But this stance misses the main point which is, surely, that we are against sexism, whatever its guise,

*coats were given to them under the idea that women would make them cleaner than men ... But since the increase of the puffing and sweating system, masters and sweaters have sought everywhere for such hands as would do the work below the regular ones. Hence the wife has been made to compete with the husband, and the daughter with the wife... If the man will not reduce the price of his labour to that of the female, why he must remain unemployed".[4]*

The policy of excluding women from certain trade unions was often determined by competition depressing wages rather than sexist ideology although ideology had also a role to play. In the tobacco industry in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in Tampa in the States, for example, an anarcho-syndicalist union, La Resistencia, made up mostly of Cuban émigrés, sought to organise all workers throughout the city. Over a quarter of their membership was made up of women tobacco strippers. This syndicalist union was denounced both as *unmanly* and un-American by another trade union, the Cigar Makers' Industrial Union which pursued exclusionary strategies and "very reluctantly organised women workers into a separate and secondary section of the union".[5]

#### Driving force of women's liberation has been feminism

It is generally well documented that the struggle for women's emancipation has not always been supported and that historically women have faced sexism within class struggle organisations. The unquestionable gains in women's freedom that have taken place are thanks to those women and men, within class struggle organisations as well as without, who challenged sexism and fought for improvements in women's condition. It is the *feminist movement* in all its variety (middle-class, working-class, socialist, anarchist...) that has lead the way in women's liberation and not movements

whosoever it is affecting?

If a person is beaten to death in a *racist* attack, do we need to know the class of the victim before expressing outrage? Are we unconcerned about racism if it turns out the victim is a paid-up member of the ruling class? Similarly, if someone is discriminated against in work on the grounds of race, sex or sexuality, whether that person is a cleaner or a university professor, surely in both cases it is wrong and it is wrong for the same reasons? Clearly, women's liberation in its own right is worth fighting for as, in general, oppression and injustice are worth fighting against, regardless of the class of the oppressed.

#### Women and men of the world unite against sexism?

Given that one thing women have in common across classes and cultures is their oppression, to some degree, as a sex can we then call for women (and men) of the world to unite against sexism? Or are there opposing class interests that would make such a strategy futile?

Conflicts of interest can certainly arise between working-class and wealthy middle-class or ruling-class women. For example, in France at a feminist conference in 1900 the delegates split on the issue of a minimum wage for domestic servants, which would have hurt the pockets of those who could afford servants. Today, calls for paid paternity leave or free crèche facilities will face opposition from business owners who do not want to see profits cut. Feminism is not always good for short-term profit-making. Struggles for economic equality with men in capitalist society will necessarily involve ongoing and continuous struggle for concessions – essentially a class struggle.

Thus, differing class interests can sometimes pose obstacles to feminist unity at a practical level. It is however much more important for anarchists to stress links with the broader feminist movement than to emphasise differences. After all, the ruling class are in a minority and the vast majority of women in society share a common interest in gaining economic equality with men. In addition, many feminist issues are not affected by such class-based conflicts of interest but concern all women to varying degrees. When it comes to reproductive rights, for example, anarchists in Ireland have been and continue to be involved in pro-choice groups alongside capitalist parties without compromising our politics because, when it comes to fighting the sexism that denies women control over their own bodies, this is the best tactic. Finally, it is also worth noting that often the dismissal of "middle-class feminism" comes from the same anarchists/socialists who embrace the Marxist definition of class (given at the start of this article) which would put most middle-class people firmly with the ranks of the broad working class.

#### Reforms, not reformism

There are two approaches we can take to feminism: we can distance ourselves from other feminists by focusing on criticising reformist feminism or we can fully support the struggle for feminist reforms while all the while saying we want more!! This is important especially if we want to make anarchism more attractive to women (a recent Irish Times poll showed that feminism is important to over 50% of Irish women). In the anarchist-communist vision of future society with its guiding principle, *to each according to need, from each according to ability*, there is no institutional bias against women as there is in capitalism. As well as the benefits for both women and men anarchism has a lot to offer women in particular, in terms of sexual, economic and personal freedom that goes deeper and offers more than any precarious equality that can be achieved under capitalism.

ps Special thanks to Tamarack and Pepe for their feedback and suggestions.

\* For information on murals by UMLEM see:  
<http://www.umlemchile.tk/>

#### Notes

1. This description of the middle class is borrowed from Wayne Price. See Why the working class? on anarkismo.net [http://www.anarkismo.net/newswire.php?story\\_id=6488](http://www.anarkismo.net/newswire.php?story_id=6488)
2. See for example the articles in Toward an Anthropology of Women, edited by Rayna R. Reiter.
3. Hannah Mitchell quote taken from Women in Movement (page 135) by Sheila Rowbotham.
4. quote taken from Women and the Politics of Class (page 24) by Johanna Brenner.
5. *ibid*, page 93



# Writing Inspires Change

words by Dee

images by Dee and Denise

When I was in college, I wrote an essay based around a quote from bell hooks. She said:

"I find writing - theoretical talk - to be most meaningful when it invites readers to engage in the practice of feminism. This to me is what makes feminist transformation possible."

So when it came to writing for RAG, I figured that this quote was pretty spot on. At the launch for the first issue of RAG, I can't begin to explain the pride I felt, holding the first issue in my hands and looking round the room at all of the amazing people involved.

Next morning I sat down with a huge mug of coffee to read. When I was done reading I wanted to run out and buy up copies and give them to all the people I knew who would be really into everything written about, but maybe didn't know it yet. I also felt disappointed that I had chosen not to be involved with

that first issue, after months of meetings and discussions. So I guess that's why I'm writing now. RAG #1 inspired me to write again. Something I hadn't done in years. I'd lost confidence and felt like I had nothing interesting to say. So now in this article, I want to talk about women whose writing or records of their words inspired feminist change, and also to say that the change doesn't have to be on a great social scale. Even if it's a change in your own attitude or lifestyle, that's important. The following paragraphs contain some examples of wondrous women I'd like to remind y'all about.



In "A Vindication of the Rights of Women" Mary Wollstonecraft, the 18th century British writer, puts forth an argument for the rational education of women. She saw women's education and their participation in society as a necessary step in the progression of mankind. She describes

ladies of the time as "kept" women and compares them to caged birds, "taught from their infancy that beauty is woman's sceptre, the mind shapes itself to the body, and, roaming round its gilt cage, only seeks to adorn its prison". The publication of "Emile" by Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1762) advocated the conditioning of children to fit the stereotypical gender role assigned by sex, and the education of women to provide men with pleasure. Wollstonecraft critiqued this idea in her vindication and roused a substantial following at the time. She argued for co-education, and said that as men

and women form partnerships in marriage, so they should begin these partnerships in education. Wollstonecraft however, did not believe in equality of the sexes.

She wrote about the superior strength of men and the "sensitive" nature of women. She also had some weird ideas about the segregation of children by class position after a certain age. However, her writing was acclaimed in the 1960's and 1970's by liberal women's movements. For a woman living in the second half of the 18th century Wollstonecraft was pretty radical in her private life (she had a lesbian affair which lasted years, and an "illegitimate" child) and public affairs, and helped to pave the way for following waves of feminist dissent.



Like Wollstonecraft, many of the American suffragettes of the late 18th century were not too radical in their thought, and disappointingly this movement was influenced by white supremacist thought. However the later crossover of suffragists and abolitionists in the United States yielded some pretty amazing women, one of whom was Sojourner Truth. Born into slavery the same year Wollstonecraft died, Truth was "owned" in New York State until she escaped with one daughter in 1826. In 1843, Truth, a devout Christian, left her home stating that the "spirit" had taken her and began travelling and preaching in favour of abolition. At the Ohio Women's Rights Convention of 1851, she was invited to speak about suffrage for women and delivered her most famous speech entitled "Ain't I a Woman". In response to accusations by men of women's delicacy and inferior intellect she asked:

"That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place! And ain't I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm! I have ploughed and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And ain't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man - when I could get it - and bear the lash as well! And ain't I a woman? I have borne thirteen children, and seen most all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ain't I a woman?" In response to Christian men, who denied women's rights she said, "Then that little man in black there, he says women can't have as much rights as men, 'cause Christ wasn't a woman! Where did your Christ come from? Where did your Christ come from? From God and a woman! Man had nothing to

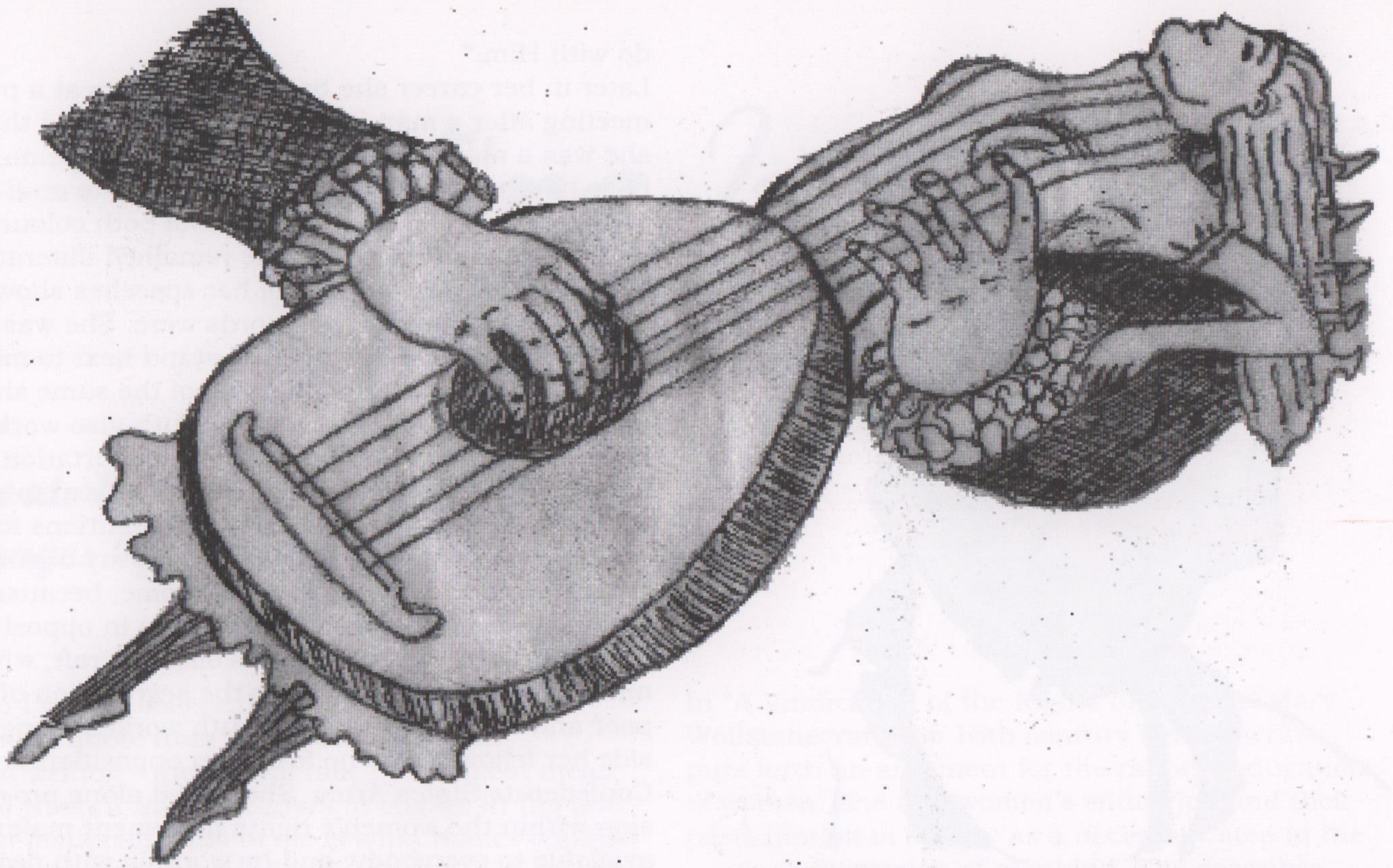
do with Him."

Later in her career she bared her breasts at a public meeting after a man in the audience claimed that she was a man in disguise. The courage she must have had to stand in front of mostly white audiences, critical of her on the basis of both colour and sex, is mind blowing. She remained illiterate her whole life, but records of her speeches show just how inspirational her words were. She was one of the first "working" women to stand next to men and ask why women could do all of the same shitty tasks with none of the rewards. Truth also worked towards desegregation on public transportation almost 100 years before Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat, and strove to improve conditions for African American men in the Union Army during the civil war. This to me is so awesome, because there's no hypocrisy here. She stands in opposition to women like bourgeois Wollstonecraft, whose middle class values called for the segregation of poor and wealthy students. Truth worked alongside her fellow men who fought in opposition to the Confederate States Army. She forced along progression within the women's rights movement making it available to everybody, and by working with people to improve everyone's lot.

In the 1960's in the USA the National Organisation of Women (NOW) put together "The Bill of Rights for Women", a comprehensive list of all the social inequalities suffered by women and the changes they wanted issued. It was put forth in congress, passed, and the constitution changed to improve women's position in American society. Some of the demands these NOW women wanted are listed below:

1. Maternity leave
2. Guarantee of a return to the same job after giving birth
3. Tax relief for working mothers
4. Child care facilities
5. De-segregation of sexes in the workplace
6. Women entitled to the same job training as men
7. Women entitled to the same housing and family allowances
8. Access to information about birth control
9. Abortion legalised

Some criticisms of the liberal feminist movement in North America were put forth by people like bell hooks. The "rights" demanded by the Bill of Rights for Women, largely excluded women in poverty and women on the receiving end of racism. As a woman of colour, she didn't really agree with feminist theory put forth by educated, middle class white women. Beginning with the first wave of feminism in the US, hooks outlines black women's dissatisfaction with mainstream feminism in "Ain't I A Woman". She states that white women's issues centred around education, charity and the formation of literary societies, while black women's issues included poverty, care for the elderly and disabled, and prostitution. Prostitution was a major problem in black women's lives as in the aftermath of slavery, women would travel North on a "Justice Ticket"



only to be sold into prostitution on arrival. The idea of the black woman as a prostitute or "ho" and the black or white man as a "pimp" has its roots in this treatment of black women. These "roles" have been reinforced in popular culture. Black women participating in American social movements, from Civil Rights to Black Power were always encouraged to take the back seat and support men rather than taking part in revolutionary activity. Hooks criticises the liberal feminist movements for not acknowledging black women's issues and therefore creating segregation in the feminist movement, as black women found the need to form their own groups. These race and class issues are particularly interesting to read about, considering the recent growth of different ethnic groups in Ireland. It's inspiring to read about race and feminism as documented in other countries, as we can gain insight into our own conditioned bigotry and preconceptions about other cultures and ethnicities.

News of the activities of the women in the US soon spread worldwide, and in the 1970's the Irish Women's Liberation Movement (IWLM) exploded on the scene. Unlike the National Organisation of Women, the IWLM was a "radical" (by 1970's Irish standards) feminist group and were ready to fight tooth and nail for change in Irish society. The group contained women from many walks of life and social backgrounds. Members included a Sinn Fein member, an Anglo-Irish doctor living on the well-to-do Adelaide Road, Canadian and American ex-pats, a prostitute and many journalists. The women began to meet weekly at a restaurant on Baggot Street, and through the "Women's Pages" of the national newspapers, began to challenge Irish attitudes to women. Working with Mary Robinson (ex-Irish

President and UN Human Rights Ambassador), then a solicitor and Senator, the IWLM lobbied for women's right to sit on juries, thus reducing sexual bias in courts. In 1971, after four years of work, this aim was realised. The women of the group put together a six point charter in 1971, entitled "Chains or Change". It was in zine format and outlined all of the conditions suffered by Irish women and the changes they wanted to be brought about. The changes called for are listed below.

1. An end to the marriage bar (the marriage bar was requirement that all women upon marriage resign from the civil service).
2. Equal pay (in the 70's Irish women were earning, on average, 54.9% of men's wages).
3. Government policy and legislative reforms in the way "unmarried mothers" and "deserted wives" were treated.
4. Legalisation of contraception.
5. Attention drawn to the one house/one family issue - calling for state housing for homeless families.
6. Equal access to education.

Upon publication, "Chains or Change" sold out in a matter of minutes, and the women were invited to appear on television. This in turn drew more attention to women's issues in Ireland. In 1973, the marriage bar was lifted, and women in the Civil Service no longer had to give up their jobs after getting pregnant. The "Unmarried Mothers" allowance was introduced in 1973. Changes in the laws relating to family-home ownership meant that "deserted wives" had some "ownership" of the property, and husbands could not sell the home upon leaving. "Deserted wives" allowance was also created. In 1985, contraception was legalised in Ireland. Wages

however are still not equal. Women working in industrial sectors, for example, earn approximately €170 less than men every week. In the 1990's third level education (i.e. university, college and technological institutes) fees were abolished in Ireland. It was hoped that this change would enable everyone to follow through to third level education.

The work of women in the IWLM highlighted personal issues for women in Ireland too. They were the first to write about homosexuality from a woman's perspective. Until the 1970's female homosexuality was non-existent to many Irish people. It wasn't that it didn't exist, people just didn't believe in it. Through interviews with lesbian women in the Irish Times it was brought to the public's attention and gradually became less and less taboo over the years. The IWLM were also involved in the "contraception train". In 1971, 47 women carried the pill and condoms from British ruled Belfast, over the border to Connolly Station in Dublin. They were greeted by hundreds of women awaiting the illegal contraceptive pills in the Catholic Republic of Ireland. Finally, corruption in the police force was also publicised when one of the members was falsely arrested on prostitution charges. She was imprisoned and the case went to court. Huge protests were staged and finally the case was thrown out of the courts and it was made public knowledge that the police had invented the charges brought against her. As a result of these falsifications thousands of people who had previously accepted the legitimacy of the police force and the honour of the "good guys", learned that in fact the police are lying bastards, who will suppress freedom to maintain the status quo. These activities highlight many of the improvements to Irish women's lives in the later half of the 20th Century. Ireland has gone from being a repressive, backward Catholic country, to a fairly liberal, fairly open society, with a political system that is no longer dictated by the clergy. We still have a way to go in terms of the legalisation of abortion, domestic violence, rape convictions and general attitudes contributing to women's subordination and objectification, but all we can do is take inspiration, educate and challenge ignorant attitudes.



The last woman I want to talk about is Cindy Crabb, and the zine she writes called "Doris". She started writing in 1991, and issue 24 just came out in 2007. The way she writes is unbelievably beautiful. She takes on "the personal is political" idea and opens her heart and soul to the reader. Doris includes, (to name a few themes) stories of sexual abuse survival, how to cope with depression, dealing with bereavement, permaculture, how to work better in terms of activist and self education groups, how to come to terms with social conditioning and attitudes and expectations of friends and family to become a freer person, and finally and simply, how to open your mouth and sing. She writes so honestly about what it feels like to be a woman, with insecurities, hurts, needs and dreams and how we must learn to be comfortable and unafraid to just be ourselves. In the midst of these stories of her successes and fuck-ups she talks about books she's reading and tells tales of people and political movements that make her feel inspired. I really can't do justice in my writing to just how amazing Doris is....you'll just have to read her yourself. I will conclude (and settle disputes) with a quote from Cindy Crabb.

**POWER**

*We have the power deep inside us, even if it feels like our power was ripped from us from childhood, even if everything in our culture, including people we have loved, have told us we're stupid our whole lives.*

*We have the power inside us, even if we've been handed a superficial power that masks the real one and makes it nearly impossible to see.*

*We have the power deep inside of us, and we know deep down what it is we need to do.*



# A 'Really Useful' Education

words by aoife and images by olivia

Community Education is part of the radical tradition in adult learning. It is concerned with how learning, knowledge and education can be used to assist individuals and groups to overcome educational disadvantage, combat social exclusion and discrimination, and challenge economic and political inequalities. This is done with a view to securing emancipation and promoting progressive social change. Community Education embraces all three domains of learning; intellectual, physical and emotional (thinking, doing and feeling). It is a holistic process. This article describes this form of education as it evolved in Ireland from the early 1980s to the present day. It will discuss its distinctive approach, methods and the theoretical background.

Created around the lives of women and employing feminist methodologies, Community Education is intimately linked to the progress of women in Irish society in the last few decades. When Community Education courses began to appear throughout Ireland in the early 1980's, they were often simply called daytime education, or sometimes women's education. 80% of these courses were then, and are still, run by and for women. From their inception, the numbers of participants in these courses has been

continually expanding. Many long-term practitioners of Community Education, though continually fighting for recognition for the sector, remain dubious about the value of recent advances, which, it will be argued, can result in the dilution or dismissal of its transformative objectives.

The role of Community Education is to facilitate a participatory and democratic process of education with the aim of developing critical citizens capable of engaging with, and challenging, unjust social systems. This article attempts to show how.

### **What is Community Education?**

Community Education is a flexible process where a group can learn according to their needs and the dictates of their day-to-day lives, often with the support of a skilled facilitator who employs a wide range of methods and approaches to allow this to take place. These communities may be geographically based (for example, working class people living in the same area who did not 'fit' into the mainstream and so left school early), or issue-based, such as a group of people exploring intercultural issues.

What Community Education is not, is merely traditional forms of education

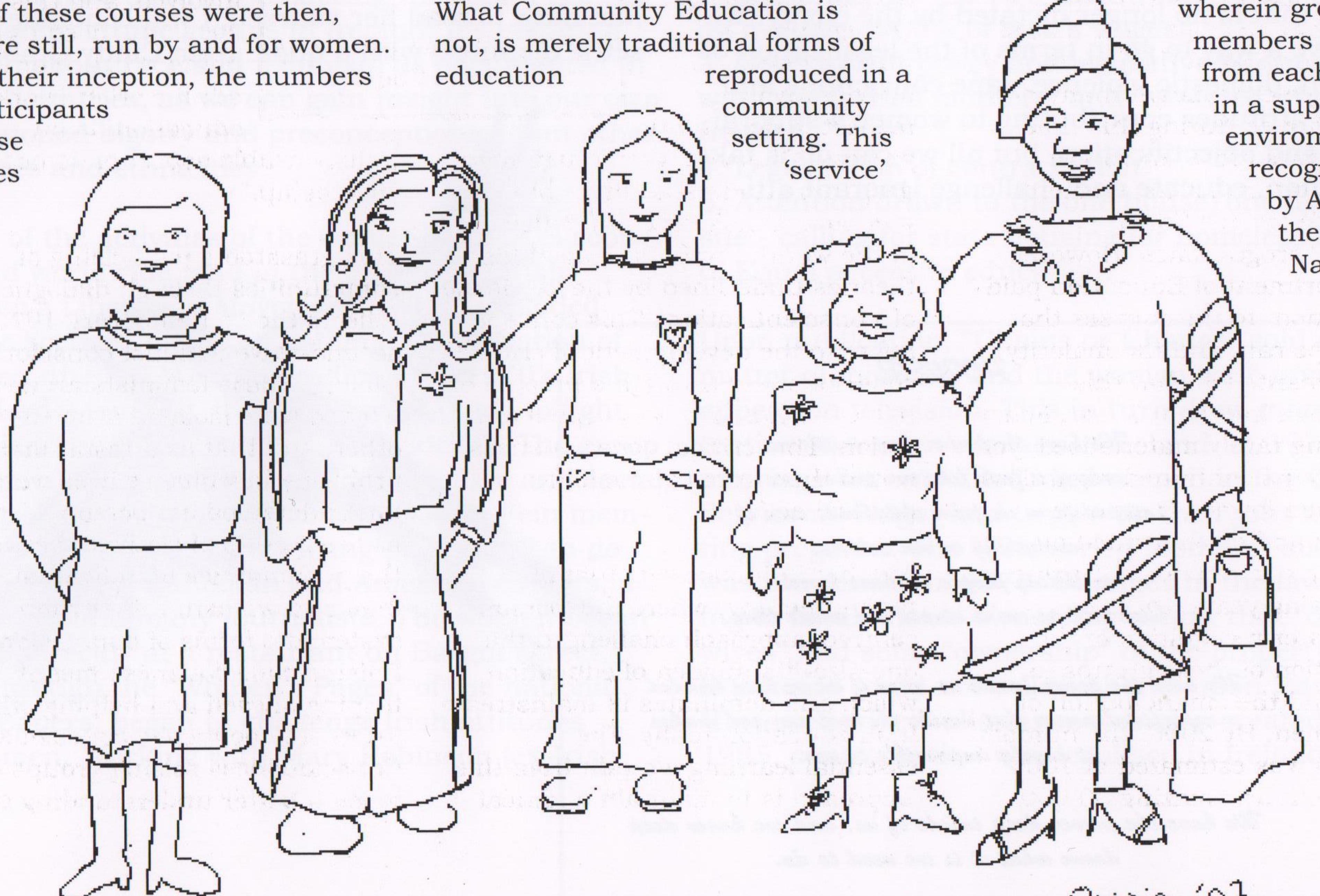
reproduced in a community setting. This 'service'

model of education may use the name 'Community Education' to describe a system of provision within the community by a range of institutions including schools, training agencies, universities, churches who make premises and resources available locally. Though this is *in* the community, it is not *of* the community.

Community Education is founded on the basis that learning is a democratic process where the facilitator is as much a learner as the participants. Although the facilitator may have more familiarity with course content and hence be able to support the group with access to information, the key to holistic learning in Community Education is the group process.

Community Education is a process of communal education towards empowerment, both at an individual and a collective level. It is distinct from general adult education in that it offers needs-based programmes and delivery mechanisms based on the principles of empowerment and ownership. The shared expertise of all participants is assumed. Group based

learning methods are at the core of its activities, wherein group members learn from each other, in a supportive environment. As recognised by Aontas, the Irish National



Olivia '02

Association of Adult Education, "It is a 'safe space' for adults to get a feel for learning. It recognises that education is about more than the acquisition of knowledge and is also about growing confidence, sharing experiences, generating ideas and challenging systems."<sup>1</sup> It is ultimately a movement and catalyst for social change.

### **Historical Developments**

Community Education in Ireland began in the early 1980s. Much of its development was organic. The learning needs and desires of women, in particular, culminated in these new learning approaches and methodologies. 'At the Forefront,' is a booklet on Women's Community Education produced by Aontas, detailing the growth of Women's Community Education. Women's groups running education courses were forming in huge numbers around the country as a social response to the high levels of unemployment. In these early stages, the groups had voluntary management and most worked on a strict self-financing basis. The groups consisted of women educating themselves. More than half ran from private homes. There were half a dozen groups in the early 1980s which mushroomed to almost 100 in 1993. Due to the fragility of these groups, however, research on their activities has been difficult.

Small once-off grants from the Department of Social Welfare under 'social inclusion' budgets were widely given to community based women's groups in the 1990s. These payments meant many new groups formed during this time. These grants came under the 'New Opportunities for Women' and the 'Women's Education Initiative' programmes. However, the Department of Education paid no attention to the courses that the groups ran, and the majority of participants felt that this Department had no interest. Follow on funding rarely materialised, yet many groups continued regardless. The women formed their own networks and concentrated on upskilling and supports. During the following years, there has been greater recognition of the contribution of these groups to society and the emancipation of Irish women. By 2000, the number of groups was estimated at 1000 groups with an amazing 30,000

Another influence was that of psychotherapy, where the 'person-centred' approach challenged the one-size-fits-all idea of education, which still dominates in mainstream Irish education today. The essential learning we gain from this 'approach is to maintain a critical

women participating.

### **Theories underlining Community Education – Social Empowerment.**

Though many of the participants were not working from an explicit theoretical basis, at least at first, different theoretical influences merging at this particular time helped Community Education develop. Development workers returning from overseas, particularly missionaries working in South America, had developed ways of working with, and understanding the most oppressed communities. These were not traditional missionary teachers, but people, often Catholic nuns, who spent decades fighting at grassroots level with oppressed communities, often challenging the very hierarchy that had sent them there.

The philosophies and methods of these development workers were based on the teachings of Paulo Freire, a Brazilian educator who focused on oppressed people. Freire advocated listening to the people to understand their true needs. 'Dialogue', Freire says, 'is the encounter between men [sic], mediated by the world, in order to name the world'.

People must learn together, he claimed, where the learning takes place by way of dialogue. To discuss and listen to each other was, for Freire, the way to develop knowledge. Dialogue in itself was a co-operative activity involving respect, a democratic process. Dialogue wasn't just about deepening understanding - but was part of making a difference in the world. Freire developed his theories underlined by the key issue of 'conscientisation'. This concept refers to the development of critical consciousness through a process of reflection (upon this dialogue) and action. This critical consciousness would then form the basis for political action.

*There was a variety of people coming in here. And they all have different opinions and I could listen to them. I could learn from some and let go of others....And you could talk politics here. I don't talk politics to anybody at home. But here I learn. I keep my ears open.*  
(Participant in a Community Education Course)

understanding of the individual, regarding each as a complex being who creates their own knowledge and value systems, thus maintaining flexibility of what it means to 'know' and to 'learn'. This 'person-centred' approach was first developed in an Irish context in the area of literacy training. However, it is important to note that feminist analyses of this approach raised problems with the location of power (where the therapist is very much the 'expert,' holding undue power to influence over potentially vulnerable persons).

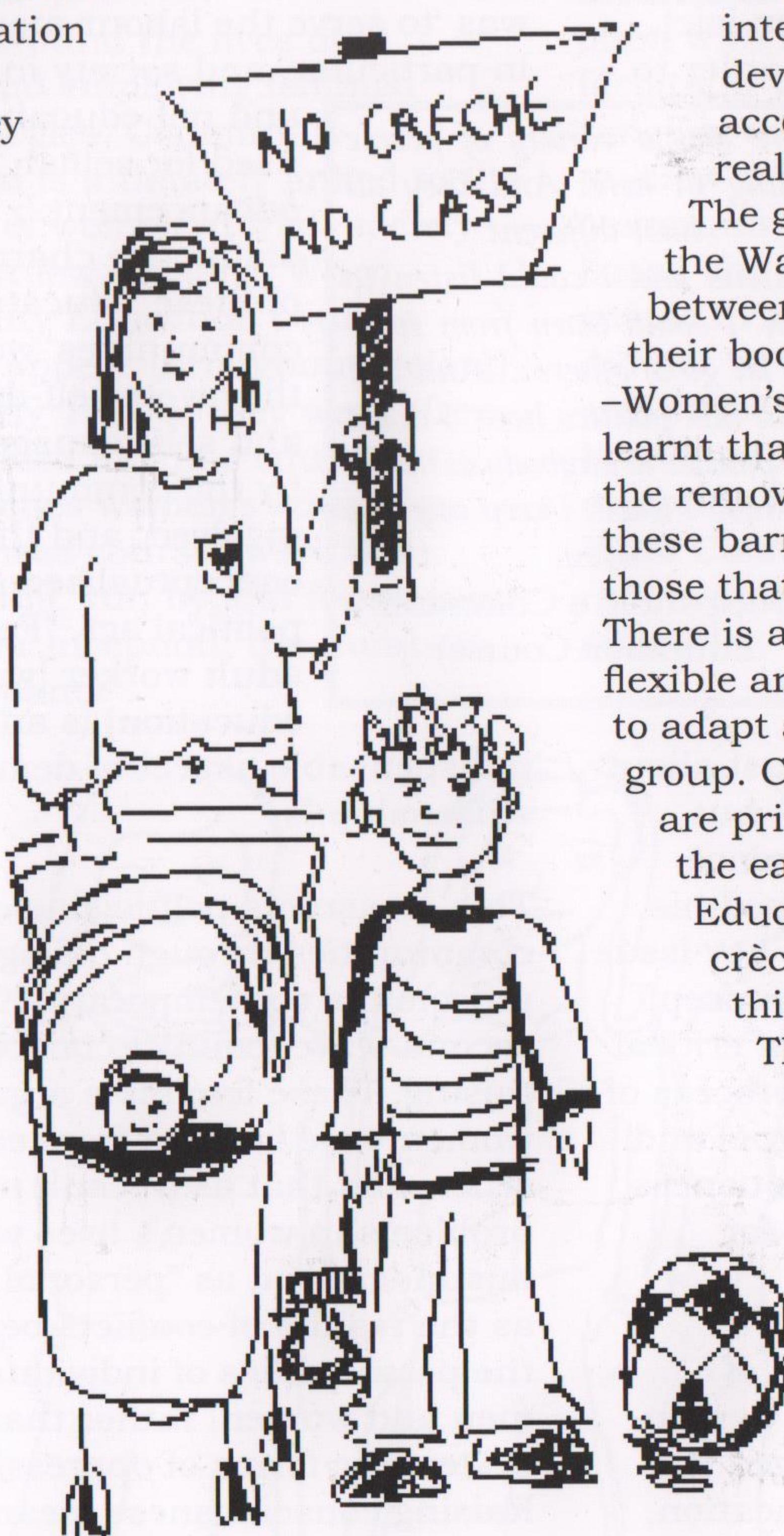
Community Education is also influenced by the ideas of the Worker's Education Movement in England, which organised socialist education for working class communities. The Worker's Education Movement is embedded within the Critical tradition of education, which positions the state education system as maintaining structured inequality and exclusion. This Critical tradition also sees critical appraisal of social systems and structures as integral to the process of education. Their purpose was 'to serve the labour movement in particular, and society in general, and not education to be used for selfish personal advancement.'<sup>2</sup> The distinctive characteristic of these 'educational communities' were they were self-directed and self-managed by the communities involved, and this was conceptualised as a political act. "For the adult worker [worker's education] is an indispensable aspect of democratic citizenship."<sup>3</sup>

This grassroots politicising of communities through dialogue reflects the contemporary 1970s second-wave feminist consciousness raising. These feminists argued that women were isolated from each other, and that as a result many problems in women's lives were misunderstood as "personal," or as the results of conflicts between the personalities of individual men and women, rather than systematic forms of oppression. Raising consciousness meant helping oneself and helping others to become politically conscious. Consciousness raising groups aimed to get a better understanding of

women's oppression by bringing women together to discuss and analyse their lives, without interference from the presence of men.

From the 1970s onwards, feminists have been developing theories of knowledge and learning based on complex critiques of philosophical conceptions of what 'knowledge' is. As well as participating in consciousness raising and gender awareness activities, feminists have recognised other 'ways of knowing' relating to the lives of women. Women in our society have made great advancements in terms of access to education and the workplace (now 53% in Ireland).<sup>4</sup> Despite this, women are still disproportionately responsible for housework and care work duties, where women carry the 'double burden,' of both productive and reproductive activities. Women's Community Education recognises that women's lives are often different from those of men and they therefore learn in different ways.

Research suggests that Women's socialisation means that they develop



Barriers to Education!!

knowledge through relationships based on trust, attachment and intimacy.<sup>5</sup> This results in a greater responsiveness to the creative, intuitive and experiential as pathways to knowledge and as ways of knowing. These alternative frameworks of knowledge are explored in Community Education, with its diverse methods and group processes. The varied approaches of Community Education are, according to Thompson, a type of feminist political activity which challenges, 'the traditional, the official, the patriarchal, the privileged and the academic view of things.'<sup>6</sup> The emphasis on gender awareness in Community Education exposes the inequalities that women face. The groups are a space where women's perspectives can be articulated and patriarchy challenged.

#### **How Community Education Works**

A Community Education course usually begins with pre-development and outreach work. Women in the community are approached,

or come together as a group themselves to work out what interest exists. The pre-development work takes into account the restrictions and realities of women's lives.

The groups that came out of the Waterford Women's Centre between 2001-2004 explain, in their booklet, 'Women's Voices - Women's Strength,' 'We have learnt that equality is really about the removal of barriers and that these barriers must be named by those that experience inequalities.'<sup>7</sup> There is a necessity to be highly flexible and maintain a willingness to adapt any course to each specific group. Childcare and transport are primary concerns. Indeed, in the early years of Community Education, the slogan was 'no crèche, no class,' reflecting this fundamental need.

The timing and pacing of a course is decided, where possible, based on the needs of the particular group. This may not be clear even by the time the course has begun, yet this flexibility may be essential if the course is to genuinely be responsive to the group.

The content of programmes run with a Community Education approach can be wide and varied. Social and Human Studies, Creative Writing, Parenting, Personal Development and Assertiveness Skills were all offered in these Community

The methods used are an attempt to break down the distinctions between learning, fun activities and different ways of having a good 'ole chat. The facilitator or facilitators need to have a flexible approach which will change as she gets to know the group. She may use art, games, discussion or role-plays to encourage shared learning and encourage practical skills development. The learning is an experiential process. This reflects both Freire's conscientisation and second-wave feminist ideas about consciousness-raising. The learning does not relate to the acquisition of information provided by a teacher, but rather the reflection on the lived experiences of the participants.

Effective group-work models participatory democracy, enabling people to make the connection between the personal and the social. There is shared responsibility for the various stages of the project where the learning is expressive and non-hierarchical. Some authors claim that 'Community Education is, in fact, many people's only experience of democratic processes.'<sup>8</sup>

To enable the processes of Community Education to develop, there must be no 'teacher' in the usual sense, but a facilitator who assumes the expertise of the group. The facilitator must also be a student and learn from the group. There is a constant need for self-reflection and self-criticism to avoid didacticism or directive teaching. Those best suited, it follows, are those people who have been through a community education programme themselves and really believe in what they are doing. It is more than just a method of encouragement and engagement with students, rather it is the practising of an alternative understanding of what knowledge is. The primary role of the facilitators must be to support the group to reflect upon their activities. They are in a position to consolidate and value the learners previous knowledge and experiences. The ideal functioning of a course involves constant dialogue and consultation.

Education groups when they first became very popular in the 1980s. The Waterford Women's Centre's most recent programmes were 'Time for Me,' and a cultural awareness group, which lead to the formation of the African Women's Forum. Participants engage with issues and topics that are immediately relevant to their lives. Thompson coined the phrase 'really useful knowledge' to articulate how these programmes provide knowledge and insight for political and critical awareness.<sup>1</sup> It is concerned with distinguishing between 'merely useful knowledge' – the kind of knowledge that keeps people in their place and supports the status quo, and 'really useful' knowledge that enables people to both understand the root causes of the circumstances in which they find themselves in order to make changes.<sup>9</sup>

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#### **Building a Community of Active Learners**

The building of a group of active learners is an essential aspect of Community Education. Many participants will approach Community Education after rejecting the traditional education of primary and secondary schools of classrooms and teachers. Many will have had negative experiences of this formal educational system and carry low self-esteem around their ability, and doubts around the usefulness of education as a result. Breda Murphy articulates this well, "The process of community education is very much in my opinion a process of unlearning many negative attitudes about the individual which has lead to lack of confidence, disempowerment, and apathy."<sup>10</sup>

Community Education recognises that people have vast amounts of knowledge based on their own experiences of the world. What differentiates Community Education from more traditional approaches, is its emphasis on drawing out these experiential forms of knowledge in a way that the group participants are learning from each other. To create the space where participants feel able to express and articulate this knowledge, groups must allow time to get to know one another. Ground rules can be established in a participatory way so people feel safe to take part. The quality of the physical environment, such as comfortable chairs, a warm room and a cup of tea, can be the

difference around whether someone will return the next week or not. The effective building of a group can have important long-term affects, such as a greater identification of the participants as a community, which will enable their retention in the community when the group learning culminates in action against oppression.

#### **Transformative Effects of Community Education**

Community Education views the personal in the framework of the socio-political reality in which it is based. While Community Education is able to respond to individual learning needs, the aim is that the gains from the process are not retained in the individual. The transformative potential of Community Education is revealed when the participants begin to articulate their personal experiences in light of the wider socio-cultural context. Breda Murphy notes,

"Many people do not realise that there are barriers stacked against them because of their social class and low incomes... they often blame themselves for their negative experiences."<sup>11</sup> People often have the language to describe personal change in very profound terms, but they may ignore structural inequality, perceiving no connection between the social and the personal. Exploring personal experiences in a group context can expose the shared nature of such inequalities (while retaining the individual differences), and a healthy group can inspire and encourage the confidence to challenge such inequalities.

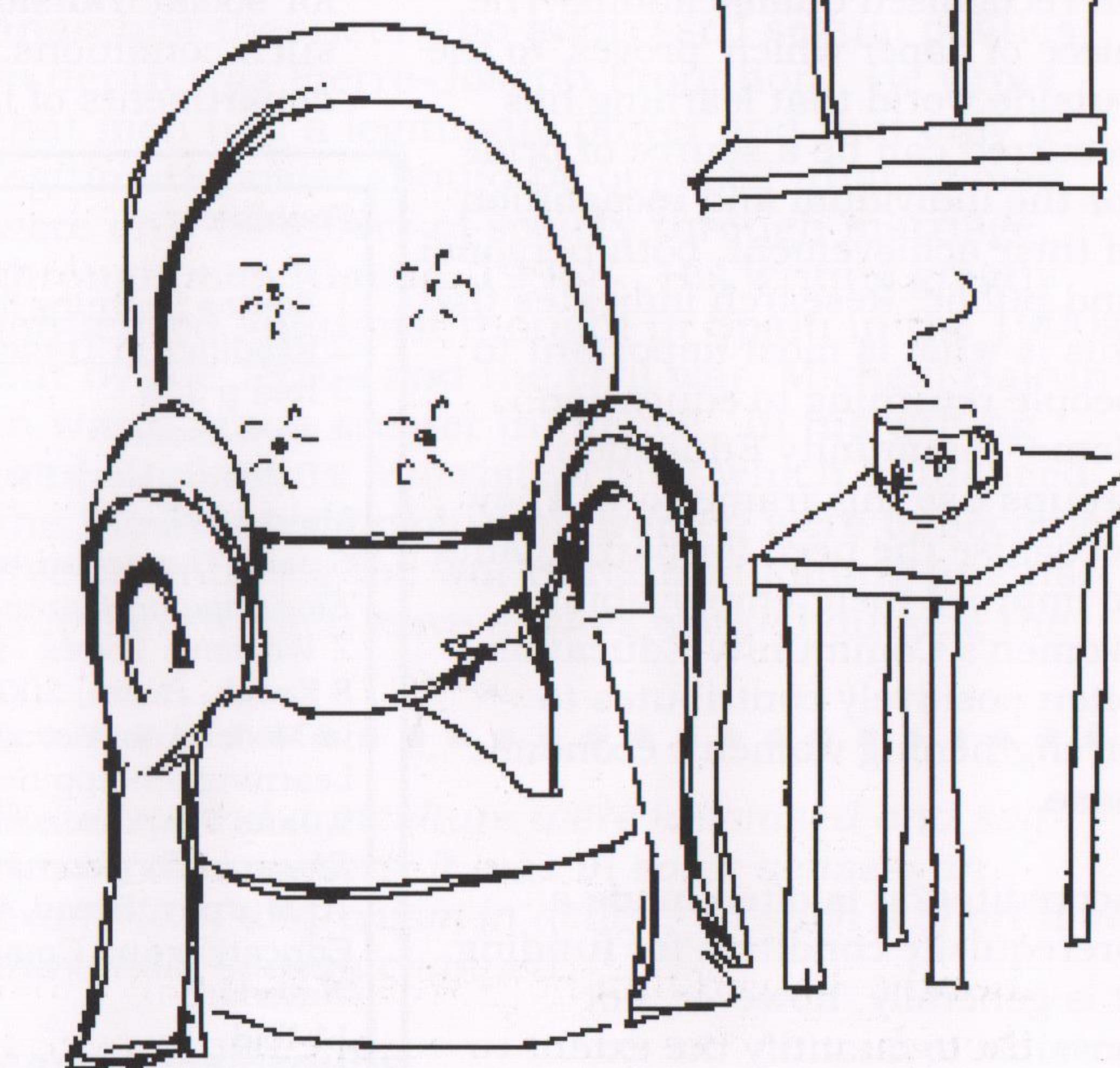
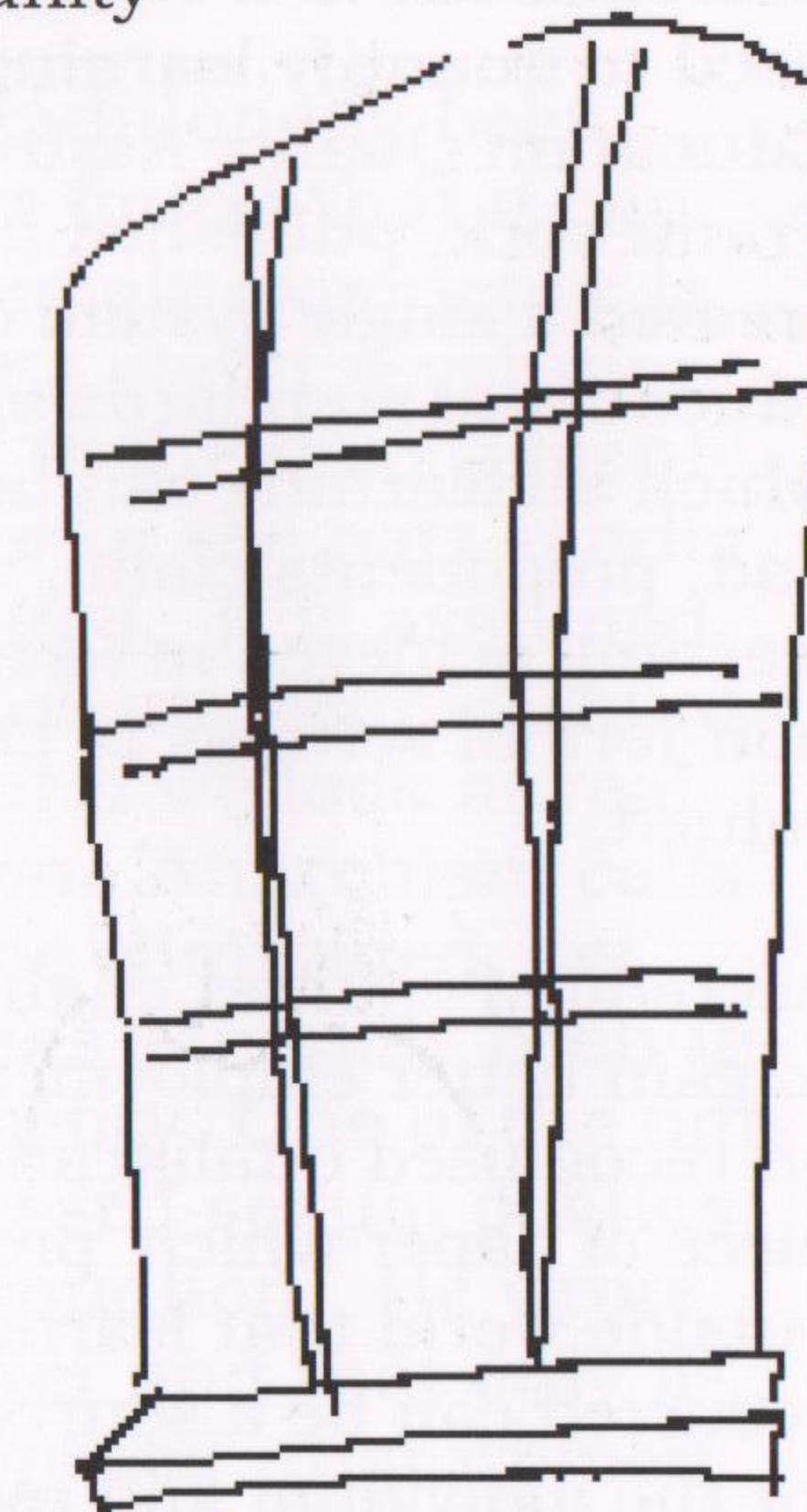
During a course, the women are facilitated to have their voices heard and have a direct say in the development of the training. Thereby, the course contents are based on expressed needs of the participants. These needs are met through self-directed learning with

a problem-solving approach. The participants have gained 'really useful knowledge' enabling them to see the relevance of their learning in the wider context. Hereby, participants take control of their lives and develop the capacity to push for societal change.

Disengaged and marginalised worker-consumers gain the critical skills, perspectives and methods to engage with their socio-political context. The group based methods of participatory democracy enables democratic community development. Community Education, particularly with women, tends to have a ripple effect; women bring the learning back to their families and their communities and the problem-solving and analysis methods can be applied to many areas of day-to-day reality.

#### **Problems facing Community Education**

The development of a relationship between the State and the Community sector is under



Simple tools to increase participation

scrutiny. Increasingly there is a sense that the State sees the, Community and Voluntary sector as a service provider, filling a gap in state services at local level. There is a danger that Community Education could be appropriated to the extent that it would become the piece of the education jigsaw that caters to a particular group of people who are 'unable' to engage with mainstream education.

Government funding currently available for Community Education, for example, under the 'Equality for Women' measure and under Social Inclusion budgets creates tension in a sector, which has previously been largely self-financed. Funding sources, whether private or public, demand tangible evidence of outcomes and results. Accreditation is a central method used to quantify learning. The Education Quality Assurance Framework, published in 2003, has created a single system of formal educational standards against which all learning can be mapped, and, proponents claim, will allow learning achieved in formal and non-formal settings to be equally valued.

Accredited courses enable women to gain better employment based on recognised qualifications. The piece of paper which 'proves' to the outside world that learning has occurred can be a source of pride for the individual and recognition of their achievement, both personal and public. Research indicates that this is what is most important to people returning to education.<sup>12</sup> Some Community Education groups use this framework. They recognise the need for participants to improve their 'employability.' Women's Community Education often positively contributes to strengthening women's economic base.

Accreditation is often made a prerequisite condition for funding. It is generally, however, not possible to quantify the extent of learning or take measurement of what participants gain within the Community Education ethos. Women's Community Education

processes as a whole are not recognised by this accreditation system, which measures only formal learning outcomes. Therefore, other groups shun accreditation, and so forego government funding. They argue that accreditation applies criteria that must be fulfilled before the qualification is granted. This criteria imposes an end to which participants much reach. This can take people in directions they wouldn't have gone if the learning was truly self-directed.

The rigidity and narrow focus of what currently "counts" or can be "counted" as educational achievement and what is considered relevant for qualification diminishes education.

Many long-term practitioners of Community Education argue that it has been fenced, contained and under-resourced.<sup>13</sup> Meanwhile, groups using the diverse facets and elements of Community Education, but with prescribed ends, perhaps profit-driven, have appropriated the name, and so received some of the scarce funding available. Methods of Community Education have also been appropriated for statutory agencies, such as employment and training bodies. Participants are forced to attend, and the process is weakened. There is no possibility for social transformation under such conditions. HR and training departments of large organisations

appropriate some of the methods with a view to increasing staff loyalty. In this setting, empowerment remains in the sphere of the personal and neither self-directed learning nor group activism have a place. The feminist ethos is extensively diluted or disposed of.

#### Conclusions

Traditional educational models place teachers and learners in a particular relationship where the teacher holds the knowledge and power and decides what information the learner requires at any given time. In the Community Education model, the aim is that power hierarchies are diminished (though this, arguably, can never be fully realised), and facilitators and participants engage together in the learning process. Participants identify what knowledge is most useful to them, and this agenda is pursued in a flexible, developmental way.

Traditional education has the purpose of passing from generation to generation information about existing norms and structures in society, to allow the learner to deal adequately with the world as they find it. Thus, the status quo with its vast inequalities is reproduced. In opposition to this, Community Education has a view to restructuring society in terms of equality and participation. This type of development work helps the individual change society so that they can function in it, rather than the other way around.

#### Footnotes:

- 1 Aontas *Learning for Life* 2000
- 2 *Readings in Trade Unionism* ed. David J. Saposs (1978) Ayer Publishing
- 3 Ibid p 356
- 4 www.cso.ie
- 5 Belenky, Mary Field Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind 1997
- 6 Jane Thompson [http://www.niace.org.uk/information/briefing\\_sheets/Emancipatorylearningmar00.html](http://www.niace.org.uk/information/briefing_sheets/Emancipatorylearningmar00.html) 1996.
- 7 Women's Voices -Women's Strength Waterford Women's Centre 2001
- 8 Keogh, Helen, 2003: 'Learning for Citizenship in Ireland: the Role of Adult Education' in Medel-Anonuevo Carolyn & Mitchell Gordon (ed) Citizenship, Democracy, and Lifelong Learning: Philippines: UNESCO
- 9 Jane Thompson [http://www.niace.org.uk/information/briefing\\_sheets/Emancipatorylearningmar00.html](http://www.niace.org.uk/information/briefing_sheets/Emancipatorylearningmar00.html) 1996.
- 10 Murphy, Bread A Community Education Workshop; *Explorations in Practice Community Education and Community Development*; How it Happened in Access 2000 Access 2000, Waterford
- 11 Ibid
- 12 Aontas *At the Forefront* 2000
- 13 Connolly, Brid. *Community education: Listening to the voices*. *The Adult Learner*, x, 9-19. (2003).
- 14 Bane, Liam 'Reflections' *The Adult Learner*, p50-56. (2003)



words: Marianne  
images: Eve

The Rag received various responses to my article 'Women and Anarchism' in issue #1. One of the reactions I found the most surprising was questioning what difference it makes whether women are involved at all as long as an anarchist revolution happens. I was taken aback at first but after thinking about it, much indifference to feminism within the anarchist movement seems to stem from this idea. The importance of having a gender aware revolution and therefore gender awareness within groups with revolutionary aims is something that gets overlooked or downplayed. Real problems arise in assuming a male-dominated group will have no gender bias in their actions. We only need to look at early feminism to see the problems that arise when a privileged group (ie. rich white women) assumes to represent everyone. If women are not represented their needs will not be met. Revolutions have been affected in this way throughout history and no society has come close to achieving real equality between the sexes, even post-revolution. Neither socialist nor anarchist revolutions have achieved much when it comes to changing the structure of the family and gender relations within the home.

To change this pattern we need to look at how revolutions and social change have affected women's lives. In this article I will look at two revolutions, the Nicaraguan Revolution because, although the society it brought about was not strictly socialist (as there was some private investment - a 'mixed economy'), it is relatively recent and is well known for achieving high levels of gender equality. I found it fascinating that gains made by women were lost again so easily after the Sandinistas left power. The

## ••••• Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) •••••

#### • The Basics:

- The revolution was built over many years but began in 1936, lasting only three years. It was a war between the 'republicans' (anarchists, socialists and communists) and the 'nationalists', Franco's fascist forces, who won out in 1939. Although the anarchists lost the war the society they lived in during those years has inspired anarchists ever since.

# Gendered Revolutions

"Woman, differing from man but not inferior to him, intelligent, industrious and free like him, is declared his equal both in rights and in political and social functions and duties" Michael Bakunin

(pretty much all he has to say on the subject)

Spanish Civil War, I chose for the obvious reasons that it was an anarchist revolution and the birthplace of Mujeres Libres, an inspirational women's organisation. The real experience of women and women's groups in these revolutions is incredibly valuable to anarchists if we aim to create a truly equal society. I will explore the women's organisations, the ways they tried to change society and the barriers they faced.

As most political theory has traditionally been written by men, feminists have found that it can contain a male-bias and the female experience is often overlooked. Those writing about revolution have not paid much attention to the involvement of women in these struggles, or in the part gender plays in the new societies created. It is assumed that with the downfall of capitalism, gender equality comes about naturally. But if we look at real examples, this does not happen. Anarchism calls for all kinds of oppression to be eliminated, yet women's specific oppression has generally been ignored in classical anarchist theory. One of the only anarchist theorists who addressed sexual politics in depth was Pierre-Joseph Proudhon. He wrote that men had a legitimate power and that only illegitimate power should be opposed; that women were only members of society through marriage, through men (Gemie, 1996). His writing greatly influenced anarchist thought in Spain in the 1900s but by the 1930s and the civil war, Micheal Bakunin was a much greater influence. In his writing (and similarly in Marxist writing which influenced the Nicaraguan revolution) women were to become free by entering the workforce and joining unions. But poor women have always worked outside the

Industry and agriculture were unionised and self-run by the workers; it was in some senses, an example of anarchism in action. In such a short time the whole society changed

#### • Acronyms/groups:

- Mujeres Libres- the women's organisation
- CNT - The main anarchist trade union involved
- FILJ - A youth trade union
- FAI - Iberian anarchist federation

home, have they found freedom through their work? The specificity of women's role in society is ignored. The lack of thought that went into this area of theory reflects on the practice. The work women do in the workplace in reality leaves them with a 'double shift' of paid work and then unpaid work when they get home. This 'double shift', along with low wages and the precarious nature of part-time work are the real problems which need to be addressed. Change for women has happened gradually and rarely through revolution has much been achieved that continued in the long term. So could an anarchist revolution do more harm than good for women? Do we need to wait until this gradual change brings about full equality? Or is it possible for a revolution to bring about a truly equal society?

The work women perform at home and within the family is given little thought in writing about revolutions. When women have gone into paid work, who has taken over the care work, the housework, the family farming? Usually it has been other women, aunts, grandmothers. There's no challenge of gender roles there, no shift in power inequalities. If women have to leave the home and enter the paid workplace in order to become equal, this means they are unfree at home. They are simply chained by housework, care work and family and need to break away. Men may remain as they are; it is women who must change. There is an implication in this way of thinking that it is not just the power inequality between men and women that is the problem, something negative is attached to all aspects of women's lives. Women just need to become, well, more like men. In this way of thinking the home is a prison; the workplace, freedom. Surely this is not the reality. In our homes, our community, children, friends, family, we find our strength. Surely men and women should share and enjoy these things, not escape them.

## Revolutionary women's groups

The situations surrounding the Spanish and Nicaraguan revolutions were quite similar in many ways. Both were struggles for a more democratic



society. Both countries were relatively poor, deeply catholic and deeply patriarchal. During both revolutions there was an outside force aiming to put down the revolution, Franco's fascist army in the case of Spain and the U.S. backed Contras in the case of Nicaragua. In both, to different degrees, real revolution was taking place. People self-organised within their communities, urban and rural, feeding and educating themselves, working together and struggling to get rid of class hierarchies within society. However, scratching the surface of these societies, we find a level of gender inequality, a real resistance to women's freedom, and a reluctance to change gender structure in society.

## Autonomy

In both revolutions I mentioned, women's groups formed which were separate from the main revolutionary movement. In Nicaragua AMNLAE, the women's wing, were created by, and answered to, the FSLN, the Sandinista party. Their primary aim was getting women involved in fighting for the revolution (later it became defence of the revolution) and their first loyalty was to the Sandinista movement. This was not recognised by women as a problem because the FSLN were seen as pro-women; having brought in laws banning sexist advertising and stating that men must share the housework equally with women. Socialist women were very active in most areas of Nicaraguan society. Women took part in the fighting, first to overthrow Somoza and then to defend the new socialist society. During those first years many gains were made for women and at one point women made up 40% of the militia and 50% of the government.

As the war progressed, women's needs became secondary even within AMNLAE. In 1984, coming up to an election, while AMNLAE were focused on the war and arguing to have women included in the draft, a national conference was called. The issues women raised there were domestic abuse, contraception, abortion, rape, and machismo (Chinchilla, 1994). The general secretary of AMNLAE stated that "Problems such as male-female relations, pregnancy, and divorce are complex... It's not that we aren't interested in finding solutions to these problems, no. It's just that we have other priorities" Leaders of AMNLAE never stood up against the FSLN even when it came to pushing women's needs. They found themselves in charge of 'women's issues'

*They [AMNLAE] sewed knapsacks, raised money, dropped in on the brigadists' parents while their children were away, and set up small libraries... This, after all, was "what women do." (Randall, 1994, 26)*

This reinforced the idea of women's roles being different and separate from men's roles. It did little to challenge women's subordination. The issues that were real to women were not tackled in the Nicaraguan revolution and any gains made were easily retracted after the Sandinistas left power. The lack of autonomy of the group was hugely influential in this.

## Nicaraguan revolution (1979)

### The Basics:

In 1979 the Sandinistas, a socialist organisation, successfully overthrew the Somoza dictatorship and, with the support of the people, gained control of Nicaragua. The Sandinista government was in power for 10 years until 1990 when they lost an election to an alliance of right wing political parties. During their term in power, the US supported and armed counter-revolutionaries, Somoza's National

In Spain Mujeres Libres (Free Women) formed in 1936 as a stand-alone organisation, however, financially they were quite dependant on the CNT (anarcho-syndicalist union) and this became a problem for them. Women began with a support network to discuss difficulties facing women within the CNT but very quickly realised the need for autonomy in their movement. They were afraid the unions could make a decision to disband Mujeres Libres if they had control over it.

From their statements and policies we can see that the Mujeres Libres position was much more strongly feminist than that of AMNLAE. They had long-term goals for the place of women in society and wrote often about the need for men to change their attitudes and behaviour towards women. As a relatively autonomous group they were able to criticise the anarchist movement with greater freedom. They saw that the anarchist society being created in Spain was not equally benefiting women as it was men. Unfortunately the difficulties that came with this relative autonomy included a difficult relationship with the 'wider' anarchist movement.

There was a hostility and lack of understanding when it came to the need for autonomy for the women's movement. Mujeres Libres were in the position of having to apologise for their views and were constantly seeking recognition of their status, as well as having to ask for finances. The CNT, never recognising the need for Mujeres Libres to even exist, were unsympathetic to women's needs. While the CNT and other unions understood the need for women to become part of the workforce and involved in politics, they were blind to the problems of the double shift and childcare provision. Mujeres Libres were often reluctant to challenge the revolutionary movement as they were solid in their anarchist beliefs and many were loyal, active participants in the CNT or other unions. Mujeres Libres also faced difficulties in breaking away from dealing with what are seen as women's issues, childcare etc. These issues included the division of labour in the home and on the family land, domestic violence and sexism within anarchist organisations. Both groups had to stand up to accusations of 'splitting the movement' when they tried to raise these issues.

## Patriarchy in the movements

As well as working in the home, women in industrial areas of Spain often worked in the textile

industry in factories or from home. In rural areas women worked on the family farm as well as taking care of the children. Women spent most of their time in the home and didn't have much experience of organised politics. They were often paid workers, unpaid workers and carers at home, and had to become politically active on top of that. Mujeres Libres focused on educating and training women, as they believed this would empower them. They tackled women's immediate needs but kept in mind the long term aims of changing women's role and making society more equal. Due in part to their bad relationship with the anarchist unions they had only partial success. Women gained education and confidence but when they tried to become involved in anarchist groups often they were not welcome.

Mujeres Libres faced a struggle against blatant and unapologetic sexism within the anarchist movement. Activists complained that "women were ridiculed, ignored and at worst treated like sex objects" at anarchist events (Nash, 1995, 79). This was a severe setback for the women's movement, struggling to change women's lives and to be equal participants in the anarchist revolution. Nash (ibid) claims that anarchism was, in theory, more sympathetic to women than other groups active in the revolution; socialists and communists. However she notes the "glaring contradictions" between anarchist theory and what actually happened among anarchists in Spain, even before the war. The overall hostility towards Mujeres Libres as an organisation also reflects this sexism. Acklesburg's (1991) *Free Women of Spain* leaves the reader with the impression that there was a deliberate blocking, by anarchist men, of the attempts of women to break free from their subordinate position in society. Mujeres Libres reluctantly organised as a women-only group and intended their separation to be a temporary strategy. Even so, the male dominated CNT treated them with contempt. The sexism they experienced within the anarchist movement showed them that women's oppression was actively ignored and this made reaching their aims far more difficult for the anarchist women. To begin tackling sexism in society must have seemed far more challenging when faced with this level of sexism within your own organisations.

In the FSLN, sexism was less glaring and worked on a different level. The relations between the women's group and the Socialist movement were less hostile and the inequality more covert. In the militia groups during the revolution women reported feeling a high level of equality with men. But women

didn't rise through the ranks of the army in the same way that men did. Once in power the Sandinista government gradually had fewer women and there were never any women on the national executive. War did allow women to be seen as stronger and more able for political activity, but only to the extent that they could be seen as being masculine. Women who were more 'male' were allowed into the male dominated structures and these were usually those who were not feminist or were moderate in their expectations of change for women (Randall, 1994). The unequal nature of relations between women and the wider movements made it incredibly difficult for women to achieve change. As groups and as individuals, women, particularly feminist women, were denied access to power.

## Times of war

In the two revolutions the issue of whether women's needs could be addressed during war came up. In both cases a reason for refusing to address women's needs was that all effort needed to be focused on the revolution or the war. Women in Nicaragua however, gained their most important victories as regards their position in society during the war. By participating fully in all areas of the struggle, including armed combat, the women began to be seen as having a place in society outside of the home. Although this is an example of women needing to take on 'male' roles to gain respect, men in the army also cooked food and washed their clothes, performing roles that were usually seen as 'female'. For men and women, through necessity, gender roles were challenged. Women reported feeling high levels of respect among their comrades. The success in this case implies that it is possible to attempt to address women's needs while participating in struggle. Gender relations are not something which should be left until after the revolution to tackle as the FSLN claimed. The return of women to the home and to their children after the war meant many of these gains were lost. In fact many women were treated very badly on their return from war as they had lived with men, they were seen as being promiscuous. The changes within small groups of men and women living and fighting together were revolutionary but was not made part of the political aims of the Sandinistas and had little effect on Nicaraguan society.

In Spain, women were not allowed to take part in armed combat and men and women were separated, with women doing the traditional 'women's work' of nursing, collecting food, and sewing. This separation of the sexes was unnecessary, as we can see from the Nicaraguan example, and related to a failure to question gendered division of labour. The work that women did during the Spanish Civil war was crucial but it did not have the same status as armed struggle and served to affirm women's subordinate role in society rather than challenge it. When there is a war going on the economic situation worsens as resources are diverted to the war effort and this is problematic for both men and women. Usually women have the responsibility for feeding the family and this can be far more difficult in times of crisis. Women's needs and the needs of

the people cannot be put to one side. If participation in the war does not have the support of the people, as we can see in Nicaragua, this will harm not only the people of the country but the people's faith in the revolution.

When women left to join the army in Nicaragua, it was not men who were taking over some of the women's role as primary carer, but other women. For some it was the grandmother or aunts, for middle and upper class women it was a working class child minder. The class structure was being reinforced by those who sought to challenge it. While individual women were changing their status or becoming empowered, society's view of women was not changing, and men's roles were not changing in the majority of the population. The underlying structure of society must be questioned. Women need to participate in political life, but not if this involves simply passing the burden to older or poorer women, who are then excluded.

If a revolution is to develop a truly feminist agenda and all women are to become equal citizens, issues such as the structure of the family and childcare need to be on the revolutionary agenda alongside and equal to how the workplace will be run. A female perspective, a view of women in revolution adds a new dimension, which if incorporated, could challenge and complete it. A revolutionary theory that included women would have to look at women's subordination within the home and how to 'revolt' with and against those closest to you. Gender roles must be challenged from all sides if men and women are to be truly free. The traditional female roles in revolution and in society must be recognised, respected and shared. If a revolution is to succeed in achieving emancipation for women, it would need to be based on this more balanced perspective of how revolutions should work and what they intend to achieve.

## Recommended Reading:

### The Spanish Revolution:

- 'The Spanish Anarchists: The Heroic Years' by Murray Bookchin
- 'Spanish Anarchism and Women's Liberation' by Temma Kaplan
- 'Free Women of Spain: Anarchism and the Struggle for the Emancipation of Women' by Martha Acklesburg
- 'Defying Male Civilisation: Women in the Spanish Civil War' by Mary Nash

### The Nicaraguan Revolution:

- 'Sandino's Daughters' and 'Sandino's Daughters Revisited' by Margaret Randall
- 'Nicaragua in Revolution' by Tomas Walker
- 'Revolutionary Popular Feminism in Nicaragua: Articulating Class, Gender and National Sovereignty' and 'Feminism, Revolution and transitions in Nicaragua' by Norma Chinchilla

### General reading:

- 'Women, Resistance and Revolution' and 'Women's Consciousness, Men's World' by Sheila Rowbotham
- 'Anarchism and Feminism: A historical Survey' by Sharif Gemie



## Did you know...

*When the bicycle was born, it was generally believed physically unsafe and morally unacceptable for women to cycle?*

**words and image by sinéad**

Victorian England viewed women as very fragile creatures. It was believed they should limit their movement and physical exertion. They should be still and quiet. It was generally socially unacceptable for women or girls to lift, climb or run or to spread their legs for any purpose.

The first widely used bicycle was invented around the 1870s, and was known as the 'High-wheeler' or 'Penny-farthing'. These bicycles were very unstable and were difficult to even mount let alone cycle. It wasn't until the safety bicycle emerged in the late 1880s that it became possible for women to hop on. The bicycle is viewed by many as a significant point in the history of women's liberation. Firstly, it increased the physical mobility of women in general and thereby their independence. Cycling eventually broke down a lot of the social taboos which imprisoned women of that era, such as their restraint from physical exertion and not being allowed out of the home unaccompanied. Even the emergence of ' bloomers' (the first form of socially acceptable female trousers) were designed to facilitate cycling.

But like all acts of emancipation, there was much objection to women cycling. There was great fear that women cycling would upset the social order; fear that they would become too

Eventually a 'ladies' bicycle was designed, which had a different 'hygienic' saddle shape which reduced friction in 'sensitive' areas. They were generally also heavier, had raised handlebars so women would remain upright, and a dropped cross bar so women could cycle in skirts. The medical world also changed tact, deciding cycling would actually strengthen a woman's physique making her more able to bear children. But although it was now socially acceptable for women to cycle, they were expected to cycle very slowly and to sit upright at all times...minimising friction, maintaining decorum, and eliminating fun. So next time you're free-wheeling down a hill straddling the saddle with your nose to the handlebars and your cares in the wind, enjoy it that little bit more!

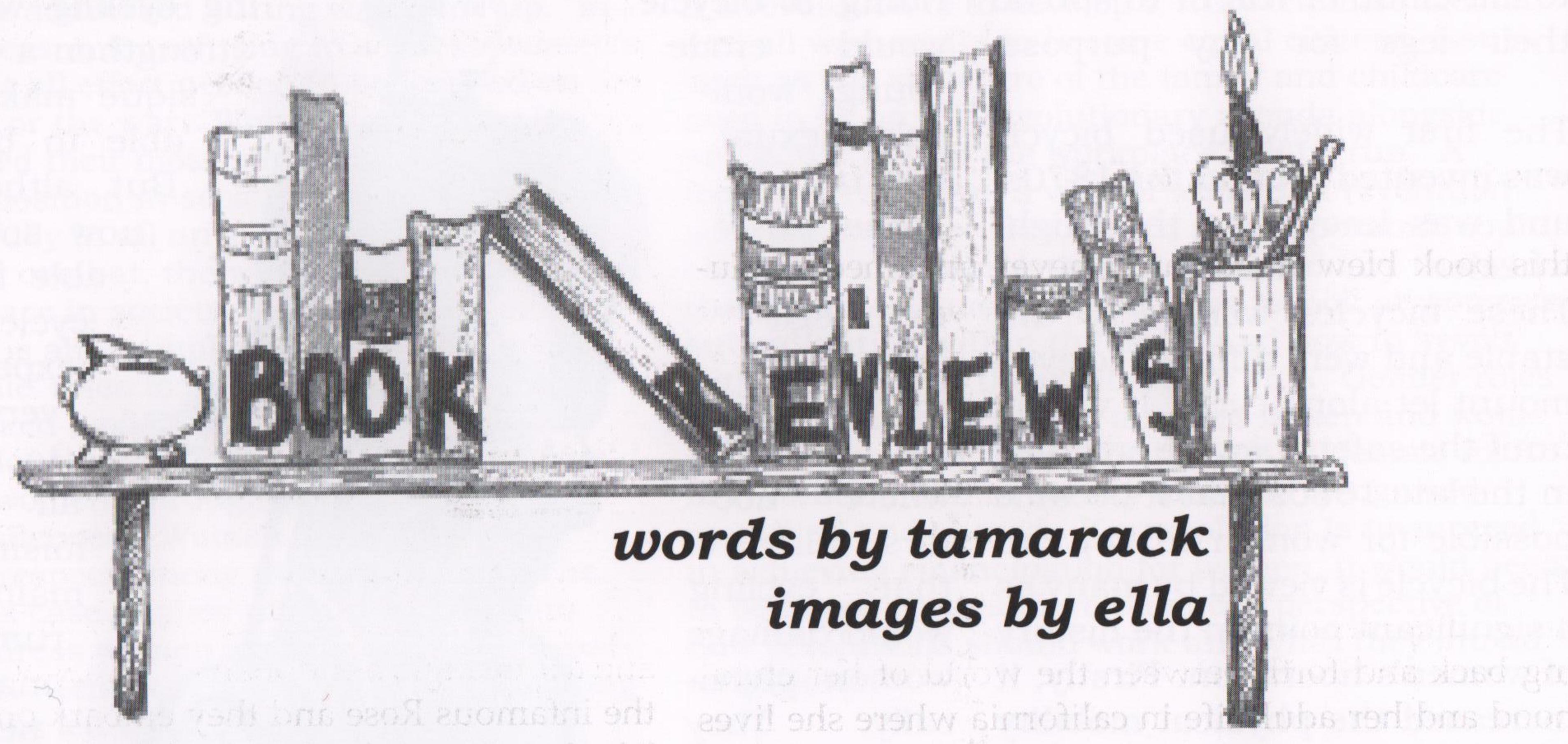
\* Ellen Gruber Garvey. "Reframing the Bicycle: Advertising-Supported Magazines and Scorching Women" American Quarterly, Vol. 47, No. 1 (Mar., 1995), pp. 66-101 (Garvey 74)

[www.cyclingsisters.org](http://www.cyclingsisters.org)



*my sister, guard your veil; my brother, guard your eyes by lila azam zanganeh [ed]*

i really loved persepolis (the comics by marjane satrapi) and it was her familiar style on the cover that prompted me to pick up this anthology. my sister/ my brother is a collection of short essays and interviews with iranian artists discussing iranian culture: sexuality, islam, government, feminism, censorship, and emmigration. these first-person narratives remedy popular media distortions of an often unexamined country. slim in size, this book is totally readable and clearly written. (oh, and marjane satrapi is in it too!)



*women, race & class by angela davis*

angela davis blows me away every time. reading her autobiography sent me searching for more, and after a fruitless search at the local library i bought this book for about a tenner. i don't/can't normally read books with titles like this one, so i was really amazed how compelling this book is. each chapter had me furtively scribbling notes so i might pass on some of this wealth of knowledge and insight to my friends. unfortunately i lost those notes(!) so i'll have to condense it like this: women, race & class is a well-researched and amazingly passionate piece of herstory. davis penetrates the racism in our half-told story of how the women's movement took shape in the states retelling a traditionally one-sided issue with the counterpoint of black feminism. this entire book was interesting and endlessly engaging. i can't recommend angela davis enough, she is inspiring beyond all expectations.

*the temple of my familiar by alice walker*

the temple of my familiar is a sequel of sorts to another of walker's books, the color purple. the narrative of this fiction weaves together several seemingly separate autobiographies of couples and individuals. i guess the book is about love, and how to love each other in a more ideal manner. there is a lot about letting go of social constructs and accepting a general mystical-spiritualism. many of the characters are artists and so expressiveness is also a main theme. i really, really recommend reading alice walker - she's a teacher in the best sense. i picked this book up as a library discard, but i can't think of how it got there.

**words by tamarack  
images by ella**

*lessons in taxidermy by bee lavender*

bee lavender has lived through more sickness than i thought i'd have the stomach to even read about. it seems like every fucked up illness and ill-luck has befallen this woman: cancer, car accident, complications and more complications etc. i read this book when i was quite sick, unknowingly embarking on a long stretch of nooneknowswhatitis-itis. though often the reverse would hold true, reading bee lavender's writing about sickness actually made me feel better: it's empowering, if dark and harsh. never falsely positive, bee lavender shows honesty and strength in her life by taking charge and fighting - not only going through the motions. the story is fucking inspirational, and the writing is class A. i can only sing her praises and look forward to more.

*atlas of the human heart by ariel gore*

i wish i could just keep reading this book. the writing is so alive i feel like i'm living in the rambling adventures gore has experienced. this autobiography is officially in five parts but it feels to me like three eras with clear turning points and finishes off on a fourth big change (i won't give away the twists and turns). the story starts in high school and leaves our protagonist at only 19 years of age. ariel gore makes me wish i had dropped out of high school. i still love this book in my third reading of it, but my favorite chapters take place in asia (china, hong kong, tibet and nepal). maybe i'm so enthralled because i've never been to these countries; but maybe it's because ariel gore is a fucking unbelievable author.

*wounds of passion: a writing life by bell hooks*

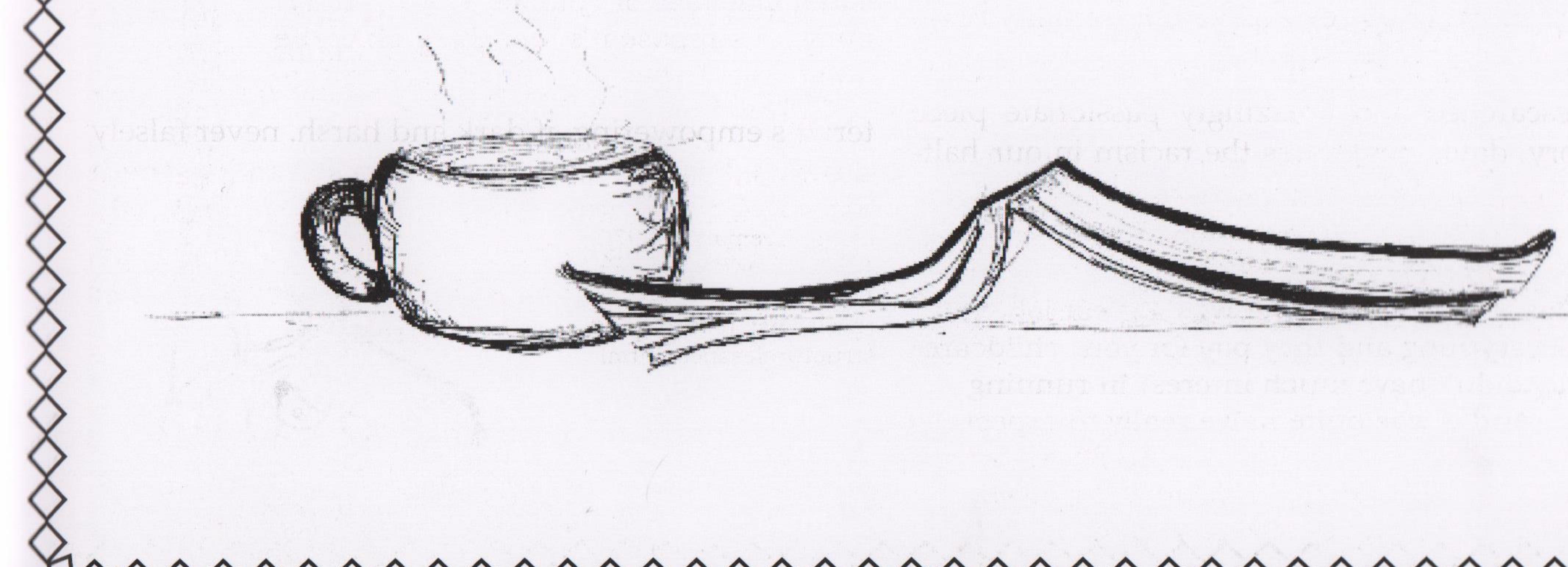
this book blew me away. i never imagined an autobiography could be so beautiful and poetic. this non-chronological story tells of hooks' life as a writer and lover. she speaks of being a black feminist writer surrounded by deaf white ears, and of a creative spirit punished by patriarchal culture. hooks tells of growing up in kentucky, the traumatic loss of love between her parents, her love of her grandmother's house and idealised marriage of over 70 years. moving back and forth between the world of her childhood and her adult life in california where she lives as a student discovering a new world of un-segregated race relations, this book brings together two worlds of experience. i've never read anything like bell hooks - with this book she is the definitive voice on love and writing.

*autobiography of a blue-eyed devil by inga muscio*

muscio's work is a bit like a book-on-tape: her voice just jumps off the pages. it's really accessible and easy to follow while being honest in a loud and voracious way. i think inga is a good place to look for politics if you are scared off by genre-defined analyses or up-one's-own-arsedness. though muscio deals with very painful subjects, it is somehow fun to read. the main focus is racism, but the critique intersects many aspects of gender, class, and environment. this is a volume of thought that manages to speak brutal truths against the usa's patriarchal-racist-capitalist hierarchy/slave-system while taking time to champion enjoyment of other social phenomena that exist as they exist only in the united states. she's a bit of a paradox and she's all her own. shell out the few quid and buy this book, 'cause you won't be disappointed.

*rose of no-man's land by michelle tea*

michelle tea is why i no longer say "i hate poetry". this woman has The Touch when it comes to words. i mean, she touches them and they go all funny and giggly and wind up just floating around following after her in a daze... er, maybe that's just me. young and a little high, our unnamed protagonist teen meets the infamous Rose and they embark on one of those life-changing nights in suburbia. this book is a sort of young-adult fiction. it's easy to read, and i drank it down in an afternoon. read it, and then pass it on to your kid sister.



## Dee - Exercise

Here in the anarcha-feminist world we're all into exercising our brains but all too often we forget about our bodies. So, to be true revolutionary warriors we all gotta get in shape. Here are my recommendations for keeping fit. Yoga: This is a great way to start the day, but don't worry, you don't have to get up an hour early to carry out a mad session. Try getting up ten minutes early and going through the sun salutation three times. It loosens up all the stiff muscles and if you cycle to work or school it oils up the joints before the journey. Also, after about a week of this exercise you will start to notice how much more flexible you are. For instructions on the movements check out the link below.

[www.abc-of-yoga.com/yogapractice/sunsalutation.asp](http://www.abc-of-yoga.com/yogapractice/sunsalutation.asp)

Sit-ups: These are great. Start by doing as many as you can. I could do around 25 at first, but five days later that had doubled. I do them in sets. After yoga in the morning I do 50. Then if I have a couple of minutes in the afternoon I do another 50. Finally in the evening or before bed I do 50 before I chill for the night.

You can do whatever exercises you like, some people dig chin-ups, others push-ups or using weights. It doesn't matter it's all good and if we take care of our bodies now, as we all get older our physical power will match our brain power!



# RAG Recommends

words by RAG, images by shonagh

## Clodagh - Yummy Sauce

Food is political and eating toxic over-processed food with ingredients you can't pronounce will have the same negative effect on your body, mind and soul as the capitalist machine. It's sometimes difficult to eat healthily but when you pour this sauce over the organic wholegrains purchased at the local food co-operative or the crunchy al-dente vegetables grown locally you'll find it easy. Share with friends as you discuss your tactics and dreams!

Put 2 cups of APPLE JUICE or CIDER in a pot and heat for 10 minutes, add 3 tablespoons of MISO and stir until dissolved.

Heat/Toast a handful of WALNUTS or whatever SEEDS you have (e.g. hemp, pumpkin, sunflower, sesame) in a dry frying pan for 2 minutes.

Put the apple/miso mixture and the toasted nuts and/or seeds into a blender and whizz until smooth. You can add GARLIC and/or a tablespoon of CIDER VINEGAR to improve the taste and nutritional value.



You can keep this sauce in the fridge for a couple of days.

Warm it up gently and eat with (wholegrain) pasta, rice, vegetables. It also makes a delicious marinade (plonk tofu or veg in it overnight then roast or barbecue them).

## Deirdre - Inspiring Women From History: Luisa Capetillo

Luisa Capetillo was a feminist, an anarchist and a labour leader in the early 1900's in Puerto Rico. She is perhaps best known today for being the first woman to wear trousers in public in Puerto Rico - she was once even arrested in Cuba for "causing a public disturbance" by wearing men's clothes in public! She first became involved in trade unions when she worked as a reader in the tobacco factories in Arecibo, where she stood at a podium on the factory floor and read aloud to the tobacco workers. She was a very effective union organiser, travelling throughout Puerto Rico educating and organising workers, with the message - workers must unite under one banner in order to defend their rights for dignity and equality.

Capetillo was also an early suffragette, insisting that all women should have the same right to vote as men. As well as writing for radical and union newspapers, she published her own periodical entitled *La Mujer (Woman)*. She also wrote and published her own feminist book *Mi Opinión sobre las libertades, derechos y deberes de la mujer* (My opinion about the liberties, rights and responsibilities of women) as well as a collection of essays entitled *Ensayos Libertarios* (anarchist essays).

For more information on Luisa Capetillo:  
[http://www.lucyparsonspaper.org/anarchism/aldebol\\_luisa\\_capetillo.html](http://www.lucyparsonspaper.org/anarchism/aldebol_luisa_capetillo.html)

## Fernanda - Small Changes

Small changes day-by-day can become a huge change and a revolution in your life! Enjoy sunny days as much as you can and near nature. Hug people. Books: "Do It Yourself (a handbook for changing our world)" from Trapese Collective and "No More Prisons" by William Upski Wimsatt. Both of these books are very practical, inspiring and positive about what you can do to improve your community and your own life.

## Shonagh - Children

Just because the little people haven't been around for as long as you, doesn't mean they are not as important human beings! Most kids are way more athletic, adaptable, energetic, intuitive and much smarter than you. Oh and they've got a bigger future ahead of them too. There's a western history of child domination, bullying, exploitation and abuse. As anarchists we should recognise that all forms of domination are wrong - classist, racist, sexist or ageist. Although physical abuse of children is finding less sanction in our modern society, we still have a long way to go. Capitalism medicates to kids with tv and toys. Their sexualised roles are set up for them from day dot with colour coded clothes and gender-based play. The school system sets them up to obey authority and prepares them to be productive workers or authoritarians themselves. Those that fall through the gaps or see through the facade are delinquent and problematic. The structure of society keeps the ages stratified and isolated from each other. Find some young people - you could learn a lot from each other. Think about how and why authoritarianism is sanctioned in parents and educators. Think about the isolation of children from community involvement. Write radical children's literature. Hold kid's days and all-ages gigs. Set up an Anti-Authoritarian kid's group - to share your ideas - and let our group in Dublin know how you get on! <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/AAkids/>.

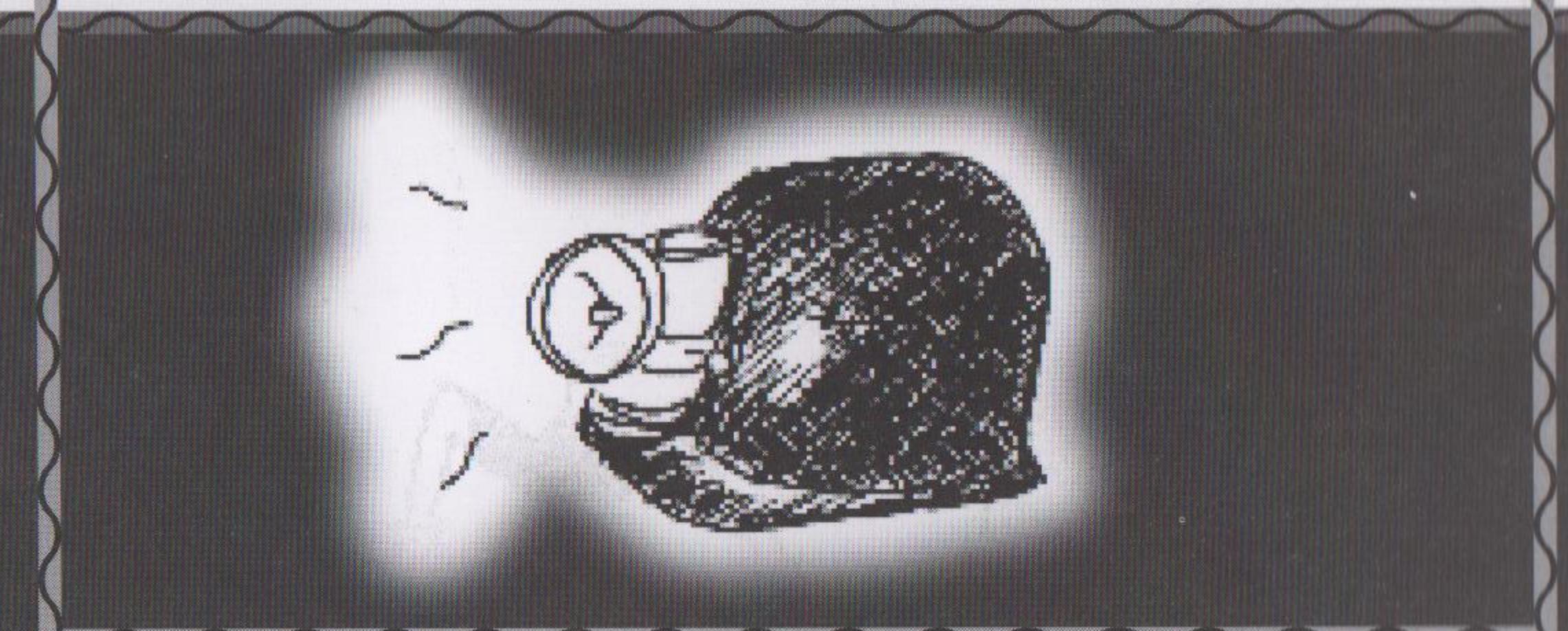
## Aoife - Fiction and more...

I really wanna make the case for reading fiction. It drives me mad when people think reading factual stuff is better just because it's more direct, and claim fiction is light entertainment. Fiction (well, good quality fiction) can deal with much more intricate and nuanced ideas in a more digestible form and hit you in places the cerebral stuff just can't. Think of Tamarack's homeschooling article (from RAG Issue 1) and how ya learn and understand when you're excited and seduced by something.

A stable base is important to see ya through every activity you do, however wild. This might be love and reliance in the form of family, for many it's friends, maybe it's faith or conviction for others. I think it's important to maintain some part of your life that's dependable and solid. Move on to new adventures without getting lost and floating adrift. Create and nourish this base always (and be flexible!)

Talk to women from other countries, backgrounds, cultures and lifestyles. Talk about what it means to be a woman for them, and whether it is important. Ask what limitations they face and what advantages they have. Never assume you know it all already...

Fight terrorists while you fund them! The war for domination, emm.., I mean liberation! War on Terror the Board game:  
<http://www.waronterrortheboardgame.com/>



## Clare - Arigna Mining Experience

Situated in north Roscommon, these mines and exhibition centre give an insight into the lives of those who worked in the Arigna coal mines and surrounding areas. It is fascinating to see the cramped claustrophobic working conditions, hardships and physical pain that these workers tolerated. The tour brings you underground and around the narrow coal seams. The mines opened in the 1700's and only closed in 1990. Operated by a number of different families, both Irish and English, the mines have a colourful history.

All tour guides are ex-miners - genuine, honest, amazing men. Open all year round, 10am - 5pm. Admission €8/6 and worth every cent. [www.arignaminingexperience.ie](http://www.arignaminingexperience.ie) Use a map to find it, there are directions on the website, probably best accessed by car or bike. No public transport unfortunately. Phone number (071) 96 46466

While you are in the area why not also check out the Leitrim Way, which is a really lovely, scenic walking path.

## Tobie - Free education

This past year I have taken three classes through a free school project in Canada called Anarchist U. The classes allow for great discussion and inquiring into new topics without the tuition fee. Plus I found they re-inspired me to read and join in many wonderful conversations. From this I have had the chance to read several Ursula Le Guin books. I would recommend *Left Hand of Darkness* - a story that looks at sex, gender, love and new ways of life. In it a man visits a planet where no-one has a gender or sexuality except for a few days per month where they may become either a man or a woman. You explore this world and you explore the relationship he has with someone from this planet.

Another story that we actually read out loud while in class (which is another practice I recommend!) was "The Seasons of the Ansarac" also by Le Guin. This is one of the most beautiful stories I have ever read. It's set on a planet that rotates on a much slower scale than ours which results in 6 year seasons. In this world people live through 2 seasons in the country which is home, where they make love, dance, have children and spend time in families. Then they travel to the other parts of the planet for a continuation of spring and summer where they live in cities, no-one lives in the family unit and everyone follows their own interests. It's a beautiful world, which I wish I was closer connected to, and it's a wonderfully written story. [www.anarchistu.org](http://www.anarchistu.org)

## Siobhán - Letting go

Let go of your ego as much as you can. It's good for you and people around you. A lot of insecurities, tensions, worry and arguments are caused by egos. Let it go, blank out thoughts and just let things be. See the positive in the world and people and appreciate the here and now rather than dwelling on the past or future. Meet new people with a warmth and a belief in their goodness. People are usually trying to do the best they can with what they've been shown. Try to understand where they might be coming from. We're all different. Enjoy the colour of these differences. Get out of the city and into nature as much as you can so you're faced with how beautiful the world really is. If the light inside of you has gone out, when you're ready, try to get it glowing again by doing the things you know give you that happy glow and you lose yourself in what you're doing. Don't forget that you are also nature and just as nature doesn't have to wait for some-one else's opinion on whether it's beautiful or not, neither do you. You just are.

## Marianne - Grainne Mhaol

Grainne Mhaol or Grace O' Malley (1530-1603) lived in county Mayo in the west of Ireland and she was a female pirate. She was called bald (mhaol) Grainne because as a young girl she cut off all her hair to look like a boy so her father would take her to sea on his ships, which he did. She plundered the seas off the west coast of Ireland for many years and also made trips to Spain and Portugal for trade purposes. She made a trip to England to meet Queen Elizabeth at one point and here's a funny story about the trip. Grainne sneezed while she was talking to the queen and was given a silk handkerchief. She blew her nose with it and then threw it into the fire. The queen was shocked and said that the hanky had come from India and was very expensive. Grace told her that she didn't care, 'In Ireland' she said, 'we don't keep our snots in our pockets'. What a lady! I recommend reading Anne Chambers' book *Granuaile* and visiting her castles in north west Mayo.

## Sinéad - Hot Water Bottles

Winter in Ireland consists of about 9 solid months of rain and wind. As a result, every aspect of life becomes damp. Your house, your clothes, your hair, your mood...all damp.

It gets into your bones, and for many it stays as a permanent resident for the whole 9 months. There is however one cure...

When laying down to rest after a long day of battling this dreary season, nothing restores the soul like the warm glow of a hot water bottle.

I have yet to find another thing in this wide world that provides more comfort and coziness than a hot water bottle. They're also more environmentally friendly than whacking on the heating for 3 hours.

Rubber hot water bottles can be found in most granny shops or chemists. They come in all shapes and sizes, some even have furry covers. Instructions for use: fill with hot (not quite boiling) water. Place into your bed approximately 10 minutes before hitting the sack. For best results, leave it sit where your lower back and bum will lay, to warm the sheets while you get changed etc, then when you get into bed push it down to your feet for instant relief from the unrelenting dampness. If you can't find or afford a purpose built hot water bottle... my mother used to fill an empty whiskey bottle with hot water (be very sure in this case that it's no where near boiling) and then stuff it into an old sock.



"I think that the absence of anything dealing with the specific problems faced by working class women was noticeable. There was an article dealing with sexism at work, but even this was very short. The main problem though was that the articles in general seemed to look at the oppression of women as something unrelated to class - a kind of mirror image of the all too common on the left nonsense which deals only with class and regards women's oppression as at best something separate and at worst an actual distraction. I'm not saying that this was the intention or that what I'm saying accurately reflects the views of the RAG contributors, it's just the impression the first issue left me with."

"If I may clarify one thing: in the article, Women and Anarchism, the author wrote that "pro-life groups in Dublin have large numbers of men involved but the pro-choice groups are made up almost solely of women. This would imply that more men can justify controlling women than actively fighting for their liberation."

While this may indeed be the public perception, the reality is somewhat different. From the launch of the first campaigning pro-choice group (the Women's Right To Choose Campaign) in the early 1980s to the 1983 Anti-Amendment Campaign, from the abortion information struggle of the clinics and Students' Unions to the x-case demonstration of the Dublin Abortion Rights Group, from the 1993 referenda to the 'c' case, from the 2002 referendum to today's Alliance For Choice and the, as yet, nameless initiative which emerged from Labour Youth's recent seminar, men and women have usually been pretty equally represented.

This healthy solidarity shows that not all men abandon "women's issues" to be dealt with by women alone, no more than we would leave the fight against racism to black people alone or that against homophobia to lesbians and gay men alone. There are those, and the anarchists are certainly among them, who support struggles to increase liberty - because we believe that human freedom is a good thing in itself."

**"congratulations for the interesting magazine (and for the launch party - which was really great)"**

"...it's good to see a publication on the left in these parts with a particularly feminist angle. Most of the articles are well written and easily accessible... to put it mildly it's disappointing that the first issue of the magazine largely deals with gender issues as if they don't intersect with and are unrelated to issues of class."

"I bought the RAG #1 about a week ago at an anarchist bookfair in Belgium. I was very happy to see that it was recently published because most anarcha-feminist texts/publications are quite old."

**"the cover art is beautiful"**

"...it was really interesting to read about the experience of pregnancy, as normally this isn't mentioned, probably because the other feminist groups I've been in have consisted of young career women with no intention of getting preggers until they are 30. Funny thing to be surprised by, really, but very good. Also really interested in the differences between Ireland and UK..."

"This sort of talk and the article in the magazine about rape and sexual assault in anarchist 'communities' makes me a bit nervous. Small groups of activists are not really equipped to deal with this sort of thing... The 'solution', imperfect and all as it is seems quite straightforward to me: Go to the cops."

"Personally, I was very curious about the zine, as I think I never really read any book or magazine entirely devoted to feminism issues. Before I started reading, I was convinced that my cultural background was more or less that of the average "male, libertarian, non-sexist and non-homophobic" - though I was also expecting that probably (for the very same reason that I had never really read/investigated deeply what really sexism is about) I would discover that, to some extent, there could be some sexist characters in my way of thinking, too."

And indeed when I read the various articles, I was quite struck, as in many points I found the way I would think/react in some situations exactly described. For instance, where the common (and misleading) idea of "rape" is described (page 17), I have to admit that indeed if I hear that word, I also connect it to something which is more or less like the classic stereotype, involving an aggression by an armed stranger, with a lot of violence, etc., which in fact does not correspond to the actual reality of most rapes. This is probably due to the misinformation in mass media, and the way this problem is usually portrayed as."

## FROM RAG ISSUE 1

"Best magazine ever, says my mother."

# FEEDBACK